

THE TIMES

Davich: When a neighbor dies, part of the neighborhood does too

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Calumet star has played organized hoops for just three years

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Portage defends pitch to lure Bears to city

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PORTAGE — Mayor Austin Bonta said that when he has been questioned about the seriousness of the city's pitch to lure the Chicago Bears across the state line, part of his response has been to point out that Interstate 94 separates the proposed site from 99% of city residents.

While boasting during an unveiling of the plan Wednesday that the Bears have a strong fan base in the city, Bonta said the location for the \$5 billion proposed new stadium and Halas Harbor development means that residents would easily be able to avoid the estimated 70,000 visitors on game day.

When pushed further during questioning about the generous estimates for travel time to the proposed Portage site, Bonta fell back on what he referred to as Chicagoans' "muscle memory" already in place from years of visiting the area's beaches.

The roughly 300-acre site on the city's far north side is easily accessible by car, train and even boat, said Andy Maletta, executive director

of the Portage Economic Development Corp. "It's not just a stadium, it's a destination," he said, using one of the buzz terms tossed around Wednesday.

"Same roar, new shore," was another of those pitches.

Another strength of Portage's ambitious proposal, which was unveiled during a gathering early Wednesday afternoon at the Marina Shores at Dune Harbor development, is that it would be carried out without impact on local taxpayers, Maletta said.

The person behind the city's financing plan, Lou Weisbach, said on a phone call during Wednesday's press conference that Bonta insisted that the cost of any proposal not fall back on local taxpayers.

He went on to describe in short the detailed approach devised.

"It's really the financing plan of the future," Weisbach said.

Bonta voiced confidence that Indiana Gov.



BOB KASARDA, THE TIMES

Portage Mayor Austin Bonta discusses Wednesday the city's \$5 billion public-financed proposal to lure the Chicago Bears to Portage.

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STEEL CITY SEES GROWTH



JOSEPH S. PETE, THE TIMES

Gary Mayor Eddie Melton, center, hosts a panel discussion Tuesday at the Hard Rock Casino in Gary.

Gary's population is rising after decades of decline

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Gary's population peaked at 178,000 in 1960 and has been declining ever since, amid deindustrialization, white flight and other issues that afflicted many Rust Belt communities.

But the Steel City is growing again, for the first time in half a century, Mayor Eddie Melton said at a "fireside chat" at the Hard Rock Casino in Gary Tuesday evening.

"We're growing as a community," he said, citing U.S. Postal Service data showing the city has been gaining population for nine straight quarters.

Since September 2022, the city has added 831 active mail delivery residents, Melton said.

"Folks have been saying our population is declining, and that's a myth," he said. "For the first time in 50 years, we're seeing our population consistently grow year-over-year. Gary's population is growing consistently."

Melton touted billions of dollars in investment flowing into the city, including from major private-sector employers like U.S. Steel, FedEx and Indiana Sugar. Gary has been replacing infrastructure, reducing crime, demolishing blighted buildings and planning revitalization

projects, including a new South Shore Line train station and a mixed-use multi-story building downtown, in a bid to restore density to the city's commercial core.

The city has been attracting a significant amount of investment, including from the private sector and grants, as well as new residents moving in, Melton said.

The Gary/Chicago International Airport, for instance, is luring new companies from Midway International Airport and Michigan, Executive Director Dan Vacari said.

Melton said he aspires to make

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US Steel plans to invest in Gary mill

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U.S. Steel plans to invest \$900 million in Gary Works this year, General Manager Daniel Killeen told a business crowd at Mayor Eddie Melton's Fireside Chat at the Hard Rock Casino Tuesday evening.

The steelmaker, an economic anchor of Gary for more than 100 years, plans to hire 1,000 workers to do a modernization and expansion project over the next few years, and likely will add more full-time jobs in the future, Killeen said.

Nippon Steel has pledged to invest \$3.1 billion in the steel mill, including by relining its largest blast furnace and upgrading the hot strip mill. Melton said U.S. Steel has been part of Gary's identity for generations and had a long-term commitment to the city.

The steelmaker fired up its first open hearth furnace in Gary in 1905, a year before the city was founded, Killeen said.

"We've been here ever since," he said. "It's monumental. U.S. Steel is going to be part of this country for 125 years. And this country is turning 250 years old. What a time to be here now. What a time with our partnership with Nippon Steel."

Nippon Steel will soon make the biggest investments in Gary Works in years.

"It's not what's going to come or what is potentially going to happen," Killeen said. "This year alone we're going to spend \$900 million investing in this facility, in a path to spend \$3.1 billion."

The investment will make Gary Works sustainable for the future, he said.

"We want to make sure that facility is there," he said. "We want to make sure that the facility is viable. We want to make sure that the facility was part of the city of Gary. It's a great time."

Nippon Steel is making its largest investment in U.S. Steel at Gary Works

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