

Mayor Peduto pushes access at PowerBreakfast

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By Christian Morrow



MAYOR BILL PEDUTO

Noting it has been 200 years since Pittsboro was officially incorporated into a city and renamed Pittsburgh, and that what once was the gateway to the West for pioneers is perhaps becoming the gateway to the future for pioneers in driverless cars and traffic-flow management, Mayor Bill Peduto said 25 percent of the city's population has no access to that future—and that needs to change.

“We have Uber working with CMU to develop autonomous cars, Google doubling its employees, Apple doubling its footprint. We have Tata Steel from India, and Taiwan's version of GE looking to perhaps locate here. That's a lot of opportunity,” he told the African American Chamber of Commerce PowerBreakfast audience March 18. “But 25 percent of the city has no connection to that, because we are divided by zip codes.”

Peduto said the city's Black youth need to be connected to the kind of training that will let them compete for the increasingly tech-based jobs the city is nurturing, and thanks to a recent meeting at the White House, he may have a way to help do that. “Through Citiparks, we would use our rec centers for an initiative called ‘rec to tech’ where we would get kids—during that dangerous window from after school to evening—and teach them coding, programming and related job readiness skills so they can do this work,” he said. “Someone has to build out this system. It should be people from right here.”

There are nonprofits already engaged in this kind of work in the Black community, he said, and he is looking to meet with them about plugging right in to the new program.

Peduto said he is also working on another issue that could allow more low- and moderate-income families stay in the city and take advantage of these opportunities when housing is becoming increasingly unaffordable.

“The good news is we aren't San Francisco, or Seattle, or New York City—not yet. We can get ahead of this,” he said.

“What we are working on is finding a way to develop a program with HUD and our housing authority and the URA where we can use our abandoned and tax delinquent properties with Section 8 vouchers, essentially letting families fix up these properties and turning the vouchers into equity. So at the end of the day, they come out as homeowners.”

He said he is also looking to find a way to give MWDBE's priority on occupying the available business space under Mellon Park on Smithfield Street.

Chamber President and CEO Doris Carson Williams asked if Peduto could assist her members in gaining access to some of those new firms expanding in Pittsburgh.

"Neither Google nor Disney have given African American businesses any access," she said.

Peduto said representatives from building trades and carpenters' union had complained to him about the same thing, and suggested a possible, partial solution based on the contract letting and monitoring system already being used to notify vendors, suppliers and contractors of all bids being issued by every city department and authority.

"We could potentially expand that to include notifications for bids going out by private developers (because the plans would require zoning or planning approval)," he said. "If they aren't looking for any city assistance, there's not much we can do. But if they want some contribution in, say, infrastructure improvements, we could then require them to do a percentage of business with local MWDBEs."