

Drew Carey's 'Price' To Save Cleveland

Meghan Barr, Associated Press Writer

CLEVELAND (AP) — Comedian Drew Carey, wearing a loud black-and-white checkered blazer, marched into City Hall in his hometown on Thursday and told council members what they're doing wrong.

Respectfully, of course.

"I don't envy anybody at this table," Carey said during the three-hour-long discussion. "I know what's it like to try and change something."

"The Price is Right" host, who grew up in Cleveland, was invited to meet with city council members to discuss his ideas for economic reform in the struggling city on Lake Erie, which has been bleeding revenue and people for decades.

Last month, Carey peddled his ideas in a series of 10-minute online videos about Cleveland produced by reason.tv., a website affiliated with the Reason Foundation, a nonpartisan, libertarian-leaning group.

The debate dredged up familiar woes that Clevelanders have bemoaned for years but have been unable to defeat: decaying infrastructure, job losses and underperforming schools, among other problems.

As council members listened warily, Carey urged the city to privatize government-owned businesses, examine its zoning laws and become more business-friendly.

"We're not at all suggesting that if you do this one thing, your whole life will be solved," Carey said. "But whatever combination you have here in Cleveland just isn't cutting it."

During the meeting, he was flanked by Nick Gillespie, reason.tv's editor-in-chief, who said it takes too long for a new business to get up and running in Cleveland compared to other cities.

Council members bristled at many of Carey's suggestions and defended the city's efforts to pull itself out of a slump.

"They've been making jokes about Cleveland for a long time," Council President Martin Sweeney said. "Cleveland has not been a joke for a long time."

Others said Carey was proposing simplistic solutions to very complex problems. Councilman Michael Polensek, the longest-serving council member, went on a long rant about how policies enacted by federal and state officials have crippled Cleveland's urban areas. He also complained that businesses have failed to invest in the downtown area.

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"You wanna help Cleveland?" Polensek said. "Bring 'The Price is Right' to Cleveland."

Carey said he's tried to take the show on the road before but high production costs forced him to scrap the idea.

But Gillespie said that attitude — waiting for help to arrive rather than seeking it out — is the approach that for years has hobbled the city.

"'The Price is Right' is not coming here, the 'Jersey Shore' is not coming here," he said. "Car manufacturing is not coming back here."

It wasn't all tense debate, though. At the start of the meeting, council members presented Carey with a handful of homegrown delicacies — including locally made sausages called smokies — and gave him a taste of his own medicine.

If Carey priced them right, he would get two tickets to Cleveland's Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Sweeney said. But Carey got fouled up by the price of a container of ice cream.

Before Carey left, council members thanked him for not abandoning the city, even though he no longer lives in it full time. Polensek even invited Carey to return and take a tour of the area he represents.

But he added one caveat: "You can't wear that jacket."

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