Mayor Warren shares vision on fighting poverty

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A small busload of city officials and leaders of several local foundations will head to Cleveland on Thursday to get a firsthand look at the model for an anti-poverty initiative in Rochester.

The contingent will check out the Evergreen Cooperatives, a group of Cleveland companies that hire locally, allow employees to own a stake in the business and were designed in part to create wealth and jobs in poor neighborhoods. Rochester officials hope to kick-start similar businesses here. ([story/news/2015/02/08/rochester-democracy-collaborative-cooperative-businesses-worker-poverty/23080949/](/story/news/2015/02/08/rochester-democracy-collaborative-cooperative-businesses-worker-poverty/23080949/))

Mayor Lovely Warren won't be on that bus Thursday, but she sees co-ops as a key piece of her strategy for fighting poverty. ([story/news/2015/01/08/rochester-poverty-act-community-foundation-report/21452093/](/story/news/2015/01/08/rochester-poverty-act-community-foundation-report/21452093/)) which

That focused approach may seem at odds with the more sweeping Rochester Anti-Poverty Task Force. ([story/news/2015/01/18/task-force-address-rochester-poverty/21981175/](/story/news/2015/01/18/task-force-address-rochester-poverty/21981175/)) a piece of Gov. Andrew Cuomo's 2015 agenda. The task force is supposed to better coordinate the efforts of dozens of local agencies and organizations that are supposed to help the poor.

But Warren argued that the city and task force efforts go hand-in-hand. The state can address aspects of poverty that city and county government cannot, she said.

For example, a working mother who gets a small raise might be cut off completely from a state-funded subsidy to help pay for child care. Warren said she hopes that the state will use Rochester as a pilot site to instead offer services like this one on a sliding scale.

The state also can help fill gaps that help perpetuate the cycle of poverty, Warren said. One local program helps new mothers until their children turn 2, but the system may not encounter that child again until he or she enters a prekindergarten program at age 4, the mayor said.

"We've just invested two years up front, and we've lost two years," she said.

As for the co-op initiative, Warren said the new businesses should not compete with existing ones, and they should offer services to local hospitals, colleges or nonprofits that are now being outsourced.

Details on what those services might look like — or what it might cost the city to launch them — are scant for now.

The city will look to marshal other services to strengthen and stabilize neighborhoods around the new co-ops, Warren said. For example, the city might use first-time home-buyer programs to encourage people who work in the co-ops to invest and stay nearby.

Ultimately, Warren said she sees poverty as part of the city's agenda on all fronts — jobs, crime, education and more.

"Everybody's road is different," she said of escaping poverty. "We have to build a system that recognizes that."

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