EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE

QUESTION PERIOD

Minute No. 302
Councillor Gerbasi made reference to the Olywest Plant which was to be located in St. Boniface and questioned whether or not the Mayor and Executive Policy Committee were still committed to the subsidy package for Olywest or if the decision was being reconsidered in light of the public opposition.

His Worship Mayor Katz replied that they were still totally committed to the project and noted that the Clean Environment Commission will be holding a public forum on the matter.

Councillor Gerbasi advised that when the Aboriginal Strategy was adopted by Council, one of the five commitments was community consultation. Councillor Gerbasi questioned if there was going to be further community consultation, not just with heads of organizations, but with the people who live and work in the communities.

His Worship replied that he would be happy to meet with any members of the community for public consultation if that was part of the Municipal Aboriginal Pathways strategy and that the commitment should be fulfilled.

Councillor Benham noted that the Mayor had commented publicly on a newspaper report that suggested the City was losing up to $50 million revenue over the course of the photo radar contract and questioned how the Mayor intended to fix the contract.

His Worship replied that he would not comment on a report that is In-Camera, but stated that in order to fix something, you first have to identify what the problem is. He noted that it appears those problems have been identified and that it was now up to Council to make sure that they do a better job when the contract comes up for renegotiation.

Councillor Benham referenced the matter of administrative salaries and bonuses and questioned if the Mayor thought the public servants were paid too much.

His Worship advised that in his opinion, bonuses were not appropriate for senior management and that raises should be earned, not automatically received.

Councillor Benham questioned how the Mayor intended to address the salary and bonus issues.

His Worship replied that for the contracts the Mayor and Executive Policy Committee were in charge of, they were in the process of eliminating all bonuses and eliminating the step increases that exist; they were also working with the CAO to ensure those contracts that went through her were dealt with in a similar manner.

Executive Policy Committee - Question Period (continued)

Councillor Smith noted that the position of Executive Director for the Winnipeg Arts Council has been vacant since September and requested a status report on the matter, to which His Worship replied that the WAC was in the process of hiring someone.

Councillor Smith made reference to the website for the Winnipeg City Summit 2006 and questioned what pre-conference forums and activities have been organized.

His Worship replied that the whole purpose of the Summit was to get involvement from all citizens and that right now, everyone has the opportunity to express their thoughts and concerns. He also noted that other events were being organized for the near future.

Councillor Smith questioned who the keynote speaker for the Summit will be, to which His Worship replied that the person has been confirmed and that the announcement should come within two weeks.

Councillor Swandel made reference to local newspaper headlines of criminal charges being laid in Edmonton against the firm that the City of Winnipeg employs for photo radar and questioned if an independent review of the process Winnipeg went through will be asked for on behalf of the taxpayers of the City of Winnipeg, to which His Worship replied that he would take the question under advisement.

Councillor Swandel questioned if His Worship would comment on the ability of the administration to function with the growing shadow of impropriety hanging over it without an investigation being undertaken, to which His Worship noted that the administration was able to function and that the issue would be dealt with by EPC and Council in the very near future.

Councillor Swandel questioned if His Worship would put a tighter timeline on what the very near future would mean, to which His Worship replied that the very near future meant following normal process.

Councillor Wyatt made reference to the Olywest hog plant being located in St. Boniface and the motion to locate a Public Works yard in the area, and questioned what discussions the Mayor had had with the business in the area and what matters have been put on the table to address some of their concerns.

His Worship noted that the Mayor's Office has been approached by a consultant acting on behalf of the business owners and will be meeting with them.

Councillor Wyatt questioned if issues such as road infrastructure and buffering, or any of the residents concerns, have been discussed at this point, to which His Worship replied that one issue brought up by a resident was the potential traffic on Plessis Road and reiterated that a meeting with a group of business people or with their consultant is forthcoming.

Executive Policy Committee - Question Period (continued)

Councillor Wyatt made reference to having a meeting with the Association of Manitoba Municipalities in the New Year and questioned the status of that meeting, to which His Worship replied that a meeting has been set up between himself and Ron Bell to talk things over.

Councillor Thomas raised the matter of the photo radar contract concerns and questioned if His Worship would pursue holding a Council seminar or an In-Camera EPC meeting to provide Councillors with the details.

His Worship reminded everyone that the matter was an In-Camera and noted that yesterday when the Audit Committee did meet In-Camera, there were Councillors who did attend and that any Councillor is welcome to attend an In-Camera meeting.

Councillor Thomas noted that in the past when reports have been issued on matters such as this, there has been a special In-Camera EPC meeting and also a special seminar and questioned if His Worship would arrange that.

His Worship noted that the matter has not even gone to EPC yet, but when it did, they would at that point address the idea of having a special meeting.

Councillor Benham questioned if His Worship could clarify what his intentions were with the "cap" on business tax which was referred to in the Mayor's State of the City Address, to which His Worship replied that they will not be taking major windfalls as a result of reassessments affecting business tax.

Councillor Wyatt questioned what progress has been made with the Provincial Government on the matter of removing the school tax portion from property tax bills.

His Worship replied that the Provincial Government may not be of the same opinion as Council with respect to removing the school tax portion from property tax bills and that the Minister of Education had recently stated that they were not going to be doing anything regarding the matter; that said a meeting with the Premier on the issue was expected in the next few weeks.

Councillor Wyatt questioned what the strategy was to immediately take the issue to the Province in order to see some fast results, to which His Worship relied that we would find out in the very near future if something was going to happen.

Councillor Wyatt reiterated his question on what the strategy was, to which His Worship replied that that the City was not in control of the situation and that they would have to work with the Province of the matter.

Executive Policy Committee - Question Period (continued)

Councillor Swandel asked if His Worship would commit to an independent outside review of the process that the City went through to end up with a photo radar program that was in place today, to which His Worship advised he would be prepared to look into the matter as the report made its way to EPC.