Mayor Sam Katz and Members of Executive Policy Committee:

As you are well aware, in the past two Operating Budgets under Mayor Katz, I have been critical primarily on two issues: one, on the lack of citizen participation throughout the budget process; and, two, the lack of vision - that is, there has been no philosophical direction taken by the Mayor, except to present a 'pro-business' budget.

This year, there was again not even a minimal attempt to involve the public in shaping this 2007 Operating Budget, as opposed to other years under former Mayors Susan Thompson and Glen Murray, when there was at least an attempt to involve citizens during this process. As I have pointed out before, under Susan Thompson, consultations included all day workshops including representatives from neighbourhoods, business, seniors, unions, and students. Glen Murray held town hall meetings across the city, where citizens were invited to give their ideas about what they felt that the Operation Budget should include. And may I remind EPC that the provincial government has expanded their citizen participation during the development of the provincial budget, where members of the NDP caucus have travelled across the province asking citizens what they think should be included in the budget. Since Mayor Sam Katz adopted the notion that the city should be run like a business, citizens don't matter anymore, regardless of whether they represent the Chamber of Commerce, small businesses or community groups and activists. And while most citizens don't care whether they are involved or not, it is a tragic loss for democracy.

On the other hand, my interest was piqued when Councillor Clement introduced the 2007 Operating Budget as being 'clean and green'. For a second I imagined that this budget had a certain philosophical drift to it!

I am not opposed to a 0% property tax increase, nor - and this may come as a surprise to some of you - am I opposed to the reduction of the business tax from 9 1/2% to 71/2% <u>equally</u> for all businesses (as opposed to previously having it apply only to downtown businesses). However, I am significantly concerned about Councillor Clement's suggestion to raid the reserves for additional city services such as removing snow so that they don't block views at street corners, as well as raiding the Transit Bus Replacement Reserve. I remember when Mayor Susan Thompson depleted all the reserves and the City was in a crisis because it couldn't balance its budget (which it must do, by law), and I thought that under former Mayor Glen Murray, legislation was passed that would not allow the City to dip into its reserves.

And again, there is no recognition of the need for some kind of a "New Deal" for the City of Winnipeg by recognizing that cities cannot continue to finance themselves by property and business taxes alone, in the 21st century. Cities must be recognized constitutionally as independent entities with their own taxing powers, not excluding having a portion of income tax going to cities. 80% of people live in urban areas, so there must be better fiscal arrangements made between the federal, provincial and municipal governments. There is no mention in the budget of the city receiving a

greater portion of the gas tax from the federal government and VLT revenues from the provincial government, for example. And there is nothing about removing education taxes from property tax bill.

But, to my disappointment, of course, 'clean and green' was merely a slogan. 'Whitewash' is a better term, I would say. The emphasis in this budget is more on clean than green. The budget suggests planting more trees and flowers (mainly downtown), mowing the grass in parks more often so that the city looks nice, increasing litter pickup, getting rid of snow mounds in front of businesses, and more money for removal of graffiti. I am not opposed to being clean, but this certainly is not green. And even though I have no disagreement with Councillor Clement that more money is needed for tree pruning, resulting in trees being pruned every 12 years instead of every 40 years, it still doesn't meet Councillor Clement's standard of once every 7 years and does nothing to significantly contribute to an ecologically, sustainable 'green' city. The fact is, that the City of Winnipeg has done little around environmental concerns when compared to other cities (in fact, in a recent poll, we ranked 21st!). Many cities, rather than waiting for the federal and/or provincial governments, are developing local initiatives to address such environmental crises as global warming. Smaller cities than Winnipeg are pursuing strategies such as reducing energy waste and pollution. One city has developed a "Green Guide" for homeowners and builders so that more energy efficient and environmentally sound buildings and homes can be constructed.

Portland, Oregon, has an extensive development expanding their LRT - not BRT - (By the way, Calgary's LRT is now completely wind-powered - now that's green!). Portland has further developed their bicycle lanes and buses which has resulted in 13% of residents relying on public transportation to go to work, 2% bicycling, and 11% car pooling. Other cities are using various strategies to get citizens out of their cars in order to reduce greenhouse emissions.

So, what we need in this budget is a commitment and some imagination by the Mayor and city councillors to go beyond planting trees and flowers and to address the real environmental problems facing our city. Then, perhaps, 'green' will become more than just a slogan.

Thank you.

-30-

Nick Ternette is a community and political activist, freelance writer and broadcaster.