EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE

QUESTION PERIOD

Minute No. 32
In reference to the new gas tax deal, Councillor Gerbasi questioned if it was completely set that 10 percent of the gas tax money was required to go to transit or would the Mayor give consideration to a 20-80 split in terms of transit and road construction.

His Worship Mayor Katz advised that the City fought hard for the 10 percent allocation to transit, which was approximately 12.5 million dollars and acknowledged that the balance of the funding would be allocated to the number one priority, roads and bridges. He further advised that Bill C66 was approved and that this would probably result in approximately 28 million dollars over two years allocated to Transit.

Councillor Gerbasi questioned whether the Mayor would consider restricting the 90 percent of the gas tax allocation to maintenance and renewal of existing infrastructure versus brand new sprawling infrastructure.

His Worship responded that the 90 percent, which represented approximately 103.5 million dollars over five years, would be set aside for infrastructure renewal and that Council would let the Public Work's Department decide what the priorities were.

Councillor Gerbasi questioned when a Chairperson would be appointed to the Housing Steering Committee to which His Worship replied that he would endeavor to have the issue resolved before the Christmas break.

In reference to the Mayor's decision to keep the three citizen advisory committees, Councillor Benham inquired if the Mayor would commit to keeping the Civic Environmental Committee and not allow its mandate to run out on December 31, 2005.

His Worship indicated that he had met with the Chair of the Civic Environmental Committee and several of the citizen volunteers who served on that committee and advised that they were planning a strategy that would put more focus on the issues facing the Committee.

Councillor Benham inquired if the Mayor would agree to apply the gas tax money set aside for public transit, both the 1.4 million dollar top-up from the Province and the money from the Federal Government in years 3, 4 and 5, as well as the C66 funding to the capital cost of building bus rapid transit.

His Worship replied in the negative and stated that he would commit to taking care of the number one citizen concern which is the existing road and bridge infrastructure that was crumbling. He added that new monies would be coming forward for transit and that, hopefully, there would be further monies coming from the other levels of government.

Executive Policy Committee – Question Period (continued)

Councillor Benham clarified that he was referring to the public transit money designated for public transit in years 3, 4 and 5 and inquired if the Mayor was still saying that the transit money would not be spent on bus rapid transit.

His Worship noted that he believed those monies would be directed towards transit and would be available for a combination of on-street improvements and rapid transit, noting that the Director of Transit would have input to the issue.

Councillor Wyatt inquired if the Mayor would be prepared to lead Council in an exercise of strengthening relations with the Association of Manitoba Municipalities (AMM) by setting up regular meetings with the members of the AMM executive to discuss shared issues such as the school tax issue inasmuch as relations between the City and the AMM were somewhat strained.

His Worship acknowledged that the City had been fighting the school tax issue for a long time and that the relationship with the AMM was strained, as he did not feel that the AMM had been acting in good faith. He also indicated that he has learned to always keep the channels of communication open and was prepared to talk, but he wished to ensure that the AMM was representing all the municipalities of the Province.

Councillor Wyatt inquired if the Mayor would initiate a process where all Members of Council could be invited to regular meetings with the AMM executive for dialogue to which His Worship noted that Councillor Eadie was the City of Winnipeg representative on AMM and indicated that Councillor Eadie had suggested that the Executive Policy Committee meet with AMM, similar to the suggestion by Councillor Wyatt. His Worship stated that he was prepared to maintain an open mind based on Councillor Wyatt's suggestion. He reiterated that he was disappointed in the situation that transpired over the last five months, nothing that Mayors of other municipalities were considering pulling out of AMM but that he was prepared to listen and see what people have to say.

Councillor Wyatt inquired whether the Mayor would be willing to arrange a meeting in December or January with the executive members of the AMM and Council to talk about issues. His Worship replied that in the new year, it would be a good gesture to extend the olive branch and begin a dialogue with the AMM.

Councillor Swandel inquired whether the Mayor had a solid commitment from the Province to help fund the sewer and water project brought about by the Clean Environment Commission's ruling, to which His Worship advised that they were working in a cooperative fashion to try and make sure that there was a fair and reasonable deal on the table, but that there was no solid commitment at this point in time.

Executive Policy Committee – Question Period (continued)

Councillor Swandel asked if the City had put forth a formal request for a set percentage of funding for these projects to which His Worship replied that the City has looked at two scenarios, one in regards to help with the funding and a second looking at the longer term.

Councillor Swandel questioned if the Mayor knew what percentage of revenue the taxpayers of Winnipeg represent in the Provincial budget to which His Worship replied that he would inquire.

In reference to the City's Equity and Diversity policies and the recently hired Advisor to the Executive Policy Committee (EPC) Secretariat, Councillor Gerbasi inquired if the Mayor attempted to seek out possible applicants from a wider pool that might include women or minority groups. His Worship stated that neither he nor his office staff participated in the hiring.

Councillor Gerbasi inquired if the Mayor shared Councillor Steeves media reported view that the community policing program would be reviewed as the City could no longer afford it.

His Worship stated that he was not aware of what Councillor Steeves had said in the media but offered assurance that community policing was a policy that exists within the Winnipeg Police Service. He noted that while there were differing opinions there was consensus that officers should be walking the beat in communities and that the presence of Police Officers was good.

Councillor Wyatt inquired if there was a plan to put forth an initiative or motion at the next Council meeting to clarify with the Province the City's position for the need to eliminate school taxes from the property tax bill.

His Worship acknowledged that meetings with the Provincial government usually start with the issue of school taxes. He added that the general consensus was that school taxes should not be on the property tax bill. His Worship added that he would like to present the Province with suggestions on how the Provincial Government could handle the matter of not having taxes appear on the City property tax bill.

Councillor Wyatt questioned if there was a time frame for when that would be happening. His Worship responded that it would be addressed early in the new year as it was a high priority for the City of Winnipeg.

Councillor Wyatt inquired if the City would be working with the AMM on the tax bill issue as they might have some solutions to this issue that could be brought to the Province. His Worship acknowledged that this has been an issue with the City for a long time and that he would welcome input from the AMM.