STANDING COMMITTEE ON FISCAL ISSUES

QUESTION PERIOD

Minute No. 36
In reference to the financial crunch the City was faced with, Councillor Wyatt asked what the shortfall was in terms of the services that should be funded at the levels the City mandated through policy for the upcoming year.

Councillor O'Shaughnessy replied that the preliminary report from the CAO's office, based on requests from departments for 2006 and the budget based on last year's tax and revenue levels, suggested the short fall would be approximately 45 million dollars. He added that the CAO's office provided alternatives that could result in as much as a 5 million dollar surplus which will be reviewed by the Executive Policy Committee who will then put forth a package for Council.

Councillor Wyatt inquired if all Members of Council would have an opportunity to see the various options that have been explored by the administration and what was being looked at to go from a 45 million dollar shortfall to a 5 million dollar surplus. Councillor O'Shaughnessy replied in the negative.

Councillor Wyatt asked if all Members of Council would be able to see what services were of concern to the administration. Councillor O'Shaughnessy advised that bringing such matters up in the early stages and putting them out so the community was put into a panic would not serve either the community's or the City's best interests.

Councillor Wyatt clarified that his question was not so much what the service cuts were, but what the administration was coming forward with and what the funding obligations were based on increasing costs.

Councillor O'Shaughnessy stated that he had only been provided with a list of departmental requests that has resulted in the short fall.

Councillor Wyatt questioned when Council would be provided with the budget information. Councillor O'Shaughnessy advised that the budget would be drafted by the Executive Policy Committee with input and suggestion from the Standing Committee on Fiscal Issues, as mandated. When the Executive Policy Committee could put forth something that could be properly debated, it would be put forward.

Councillor Wyatt asked if the Chair of the Standing Committee on Fiscal Issues could present Council with the proposed process on how he foresees the budget coming forward to Members of Council and questioned if the process would be different from what they were used to and would it be more open and more inclusive.

Standing Committee on Fiscal Issues – Question Period (continued)

Councillor O'Shaughnessy noted that the Mayor, as Chair of the Executive Policy Committee, would put forth a timetable prior to the tabling of the estimates and the estimates would probably show a balanced budget with no tax increase.

Councillor Swandel questioned if any gas tax money would be forthcoming from the Province. Councillor O'Shaugnessy noted that inter-governmental matters are within the purview of the Executive Policy Committee, not the Standing Committee on Fiscal Issues and the question should be directed to the Mayor who is in charge of inter-governmental affairs.

Councillor Swandel questioned if there was any increase in funding for transit from the Provincial Government, either in this or in recent years. Councillor O'Shaughnessy responded that the only change for transit funding was the gas tax agreement which directs 10 percent of the funding provided towards urban transit.

Councillor Swandel questioned if the Chair was aware of any ongoing conversations regarding increased funding for infrastructure in the Province and the City of Winnipeg; to which Councillor O'Shaughnessy replied in the affirmative.