EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE

QUESTION PERIOD

Minute No. 612
In reference to numerous phone calls received concerning the cost of the new Wi-Fi service in City libraries and at the Pan Am Pool, Councillor Swandel inquired if more information would be provided on how the fee structure was arrived at and if future consideration would be given to addressing concerns about the cost of the Wi-Fi service.

His Worship Mayor Katz advised that there was a minimal charge for the service. His Worship stated that there were other cities charging much more than Winnipeg and he believed Winnipeg's approach had been very fair and reasonable. His Worship advised that over an eight day period 150 people had used the service, with users indicating that they believed that the fee was reasonable and that it would take time for the service to grow for more and more people to become aware of it.

Councillor Swandel inquired if the fees and the cost of administering the fees relative to the cost of delivering the service would be reviewed to determine whether or not there was an economic benefit to having fees and further inquired that if there was going to be a review, when would it be. His Worship agreed to take the question under advisement.

In reference to a newspaper report regarding a bush party in southwest Winnipeg that required the attention of 40 officers and was reported to have brought the police force to a standstill, Councillor Browaty inquired why an incident of this magnitude would have this effect on a Friday or Saturday night when there should be a heavy contingent of police officers on duty.

His Worship replied that while the total police complement may be around 1300 or greater, the reality was that the real number of active police officers was probably closer to 450 or 500, and that was probably one of the issues of policing that needed to be addressed.

In noting that he believed that approximately 245 police officers would be working as front line officers at any given time, Councillor Browaty stated that he did not believe there was enough response and asked what was going to be done to address the situation and would that be a consideration when hiring a new Police Chief.

His Worship acknowledged that Councillor Browaty had pointed out issues that needed to be addressed. He noted that the process for hiring the new Police Chief had begun and would take these issues and many others into account. He added that the former Police Chief had asked for more resources and in response, approximately 175 additional new officers have been added to the force with the help of the Province of Manitoba. Mayor Katz further stated that he was willing to fight for more resources, but only with the assurance that there was accountability and that further resources would result in fewer crimes.

Executive Policy Committee - Question Period (continued)

Councillor Smith inquired when the traffic synchronization initiative would be implemented, to which His Worship advised that he expected the process would start within the next six weeks and that there would be further announcements made in the near future.

In reference to the hiring of the new Winnipeg Police Chief and the public consultations that were held at Kelvin High and R.B. Russell School, Councillor Pagtakhan noted that the former CAO had an opportunity to speak informally with some of the delegations and asked what would be done to ensure that the integrity of those conversations would be captured.

His Worship stated that the hiring of the Police Chief was one of the most important things that would be done in the near future. He further stated that all of the information derived from the public consultations would be shared with the Acting CAO to ensure that the process would continue appropriately and to ensure that the right individual was hired for the position.

Councillor Pagtakhan asked if there would be more public consultations within neighbourhoods and meetings with various stakeholders, so that the acting CAO, or the new CAO, would be able to hear first hand some of the things that were not written down during the public consultations.

His Worship reiterated that the process would be followed exactly the way it started and inasmuch as the public consultations had already taken place, the process would continue to move forward rather than be repeated.

Councillor Vandal requested an update on the status of the aboriginal youth strategy that would be all encompassing across the City of Winnipeg; to which His Worship replied that a conference would be held at the end of October in regards to aboriginal youth. He further noted that everything appears to be very positive, and action would be taken in the very near future.

Councillor Vandal enquired if a budget would be attached to the aboriginal youth strategy; to which His Worship replied that in order to make something become a reality when good ideas come forward, there would have to be some type of budget; he further added that this was an opportunity to turn aboriginal youth into a phenomenal asset for the City and that this issue was a priority.

In reference to presentations that were made to the Chamber of Commerce about the Economic Opportunity Commission Report, Councillor Vandal asked His Worship to repeat the main messages of that communication. His Worship replied that he would be happy to provide a written list to Councillor Vandal.

Executive Policy Committee - Question Period (continued)

In noting that the City would be charging user fees for Wi-Fi Service in libraries and the Pan Am Pool, Councillor Thomas asked His Worship if he was aware that signage on several of the libraries in the City states Free for All and asked for his comments.

His Worship replied that a very valuable service was being provided at a reasonable cost and that the cost was less than what cities such as Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal were charging. He further added that when a service was provided for free by the City, the user may get the service for free but that it was the taxpayers who were paying for it.

Councillor Thomas suggested that most of the users of library services were users because they could not afford to have their own personal libraries and a user charge made it difficult for those who had the most need to educate themselves to get out of that morass of poverty and asked His Worship to comment further.

His Worship advised that the Wi-Fi initiative was brought forward and negotiated by the public service without political interference and suggested that Councillor Thomas could have made her comments to the public service. He added that the fact remains that until recently, there was no Wi-Fi service and that service was now available for a charge.

In reference to the Chief of Police hiring process, Councillor Gerbasi noted that she met with the former CAO as part of the consultation process, spent an hour answering a series of questions and expressed concern because there was no one else in the room documenting that information and inquired if there would be a rescheduling of meetings so that Councillors could have another opportunity to provide their input.

His Worship agreed to take the suggestion under advisement and acknowledged that the suggestion was very reasonable and should be discussed further as feedback from Councillors was very important.

Councillor Gerbasi inquired if groups, other than Councillors, may have met with the former CAO without anyone else present and asked if that would be looked into. His Worship concurred that the subject would be broached and advised that the Acting CAO would talk to staff to find out if there were any other meetings.

Councillor Vandal inquired if there were plans to resurrect the project at Upper Fort Garry, 100 Main Street. His Worship replied in the negative and noted that a former citizen of Winnipeg came up with an idea but it turned out that there was no merit in the idea as they did not own the land they were willing to give the City.