EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE

QUESTION PERIOD

Minute No. 220
In reference to media reports about potential agreements to share City services with Capital Region communities, Councillor Gerbasi raised concerns about such agreements having the potential to lead to more exurban development and a further exodus of Winnipeg taxpaying residents to the Capital Region communities, and inquired if that would be factored in to the cost benefit analysis to determine if it makes financial sense to extend City services to the exurban areas.

His Worship Mayor Katz replied that, in his opinion, Councillor Gerbasi's observation was incorrect. He noted that when he was first elected, there was absolutely no relationship or communication whatsoever between the Capital Region and the Mayor's office and, since then, meetings had been conducted together and that problems had been discussed. He reminded Council that in 1998, there was an 8 to 8 tie vote on the issue of providing Wastewater Service to the R.M. of Headingley. As a result of that vote, the Provincial Government provided monies and Headingley built their own water and sewer systems and they continue to grow to the extent that they have filled up what they thought would be a supply for another 10 years. He added that in every Capital Region growth was happening, adding that the sad part of what happened in Headingley was that Council gave up the right to control that growth. He noted that in his opinion the City should be working with the Province, which was what was happening now, and that Premier Doer was very supportive of the City working with the Capital Region communities to resolve this problem and control growth.

Councillor Gerbasi inquired if the Mayor would agree that there should be a controlled plan in place before services were provided. His Worship acknowledged that he agreed with Councillor Gerbasi and noted the City had made it clear in negotiations with surrounding municipalities that any provision of services were based on sound business cases including the municipality's ability to pay all capital costs associated with sharing the service, the City's ability to provide the service without any negative impact on its citizens or revenues.

In reference to a media report that the City's number of planning staff was low compared to other cities, Councillor Gerbasi inquired if the vacancy management imposed on all departments would apply to Planning, Property and Development as well and, if so, how would the work of the Department get done.

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His Worship replied that what was in the media should not automatically be accepted as truth and that the Mayor, Councillor Swandel and a member of the public service had received an apology acknowledging that the article was flawed and full of inaccuracies. His Worship further stated that all Members of Council know the importance of the Planning, Property and Development Department, were aware that it guides the City's growth and that the City was in the process of hiring a Director for the Department. He added that when a comparison was done to compare apples to apples, Winnipeg was not only in line with some cities but actually exceeded some cities in terms of the number of planners it had.

Councillor Vandal noted that the southeast quadrant of St. Boniface was probably the fastest growing segment of the City of Winnipeg with Southdale being fully built out; Island Lakes would soon be fully built out; Royal Wood Phase II was complete and Sage Creek would attract approximately 7,000 residents in the next five to seven years. He stated that those neighbourhoods were in desperate need of more modern, larger community clubs and recreational services, but that the City Policy requiring one community centre to shrink before another got bigger was hampering this. He questioned if the Mayor agreed that the recreational policy was not working for Southdale and needed to be amended.

His Worship acknowledged that the question was valid, noting that Councillor Vandal was representing his citizens and that obviously there was a concern with supply and demand for recreational facilities. His Worship advised that he had made it a priority to try and deal with recreational facilities in every part of the City. His Worship indicated that he did not agree that the policy was wrong or flawed, but agreed that all policies could be reviewed, and that he was happy to discuss the matter with Councillor Vandal and get feedback from the General Council of Winnipeg Community Centres (GCWCC).

Councillor Vandal advised that the Provincial Government under Premier Doer and MLA Erin Selby, had been waiting patiently to invest between 2 and 3 million dollars in the Southdale Community Club for improved recreational services but that the City policy had denied the Southdale residents access to this Provincial money. He inquired if Mayor Katz would do what was necessary to ensure access to these Provincial dollars.

His Worship replied that he found it hard to believe that there was a commitment made during the Provincial election that could not be fulfilled under the existing City policy. He added that it was incumbent upon the City to address any issue that comes up for the taxpayers in any part of the City and stated that he would be happy to meet with Councillor Vandal to look at what the issue was and to see what some of the solutions were.

Councillor Vandal inquired if His Worship would ask the Provincial government for a blueprint in regards to negotiating servicing agreements with Capital Region communities.

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His Worship responded that he would be happy to address that issue, noting that if the City worked with the Province and the Capital Region, that something very positive could be accomplished as opposed to what took place in Headingley.

In reference to the information presented in the Chamber that 2 or 3 million dollars has been committed to the Southdale Community Centre by the Province during the election, Councillor Swandel questioned if His Worship was committed to getting equitable funding for all community centres in the City of Winnipeg.

His Worship replied that he met with the Premier to address their commitment, and that he believed it was his job to fight for more money from the Provincial government if they have monies for recreational facilities for the entire City and for every single citizen in the City.

Councillor Swandel suggested that contrary to the numbers put forward by Councillor Vandal, the fastest growing part of the City was actually going to be the St. Norbert Ward with the development of Waverley West and inquired what funding the Province had committed for recreational amenities in the Waverley West subdivision.

His Worship replied he has not heard of any commitment to date but it was rather difficult to answer a question that should be addressed to the Provincial government.

Councillor Gerbasi requested an update on the Plan Winnipeg process, noting that there had not been an announcement of a committee of Councillors or a group working on it.

His Worship replied that Plan Winnipeg was a major priority for The City of Winnipeg, but that although the process had been started, the City had not been able to do what it should be doing. He indicated that the Provincial Government had been asked for funding, but although there was still an on-going dialogue, the City had not received the response they were looking for. He added that he was hopeful that it would be resolved very shortly so that the City could move forward on a very important issue.

In noting that Council on July 26, 2006, endorsed the creation of a Poverty Reduction Council and provided the United Way of Winnipeg with one time start-up funding, Councillor Gerbasi asked for an update on the process.

His Worship indicated that there was a change in the membership that was representing the City of Winnipeg and it was his understanding that they had met and were putting together a plan that he expected to see and share with all Members of Council within 60 days.

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Councillor Vandal questioned why the Mayor would expect the Province of Manitoba to fund Plan Winnipeg, given that it was not Plan Manitoba, and given the fact that the City had 350 million dollars in reserve accounts why would the City go to the Province for funding.

His Worship clarified that the Province was not asked to fund the creation of Plan Winnipeg, they were asked to share in cost funding the implementation of Plan Winnipeg, adding that he believed it was incumbent on the Provincial government to participate in the funding and that they had in fact offered to fund part of the cost. His Worship emphasized that it was incumbent upon Council to always get other levels of government to participate in funding priorities as the City's revenues were very limited. He added that the City basically had property taxes and some user fees, but not any share of growth revenues such as income tax, GST, PST; adding that Cities and municipalities received only 8 cents of every dollar from all taxes collected with 92 cents going to the Federal and Provincial governments. His Worship concluded that if the City does not start receiving a share of the growth revenues, specifically PST, it was in big trouble. He mentioned that the City of Toronto has stated they were going broke and they were not alone, stating that the City could not continue with the current formula and he was proud to continue to ask another level of government to participate in funding and would continue to do so.