EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE

QUESTION PERIOD

Minute No. 277
Councillor Gerbasi asked His Worship Mayor Katz to confirm that a service-based budget document, which identifies more details about specific cuts, such as a reduction to the graffiti budget, would be tabled on March 20, 2008.

His Worship Mayor Katz replied that there was no decrease in the 2008 budget for graffiti and advised that in 2007 the budget for graffiti provided one-time money which did not get carried forward to the 2008 budget. He added that the public service's goal was to create a service-based budget document for 2008, but that time restraints had made it difficult to accomplish.

Councillor Gerbasi questioned how the public and members of Council who did not see the service based budget until just before the vote would know what was in the budget and the impact of the operational efficiencies that were listed in every department without detailing what that meant for service.

His Worship replied that the City had been restoring services and the goal was to maintain the gains that have been made in the last four years to ensure that there were no cuts. He added that hopefully property taxes would be frozen for the 11th straight year. He further noted that in previous years property taxes were frozen by cutting back on services, which they hoped to avoid this budget.

Councillor Gerbasi noted that one of the gains made last year was an enhanced graffiti program of $200,000.00 dollars and that was not included in the 2008 budget. His Worship replied that it was one-time money and the annual line budget item for graffiti stayed exactly the same with no gain or loss.

Councillor Smith requested an update on the status of re-cladding the Public Safety Building. His Worship acknowledged that project costs increased significantly from when it started to today and that all options, including re-cladding, a new building and relocation, were being explored to make sure the City did what was best for the taxpayers of Winnipeg.

Councillor Vandal noted that it had become increasingly likely that the Friends of Upper Fort Garry would not meet the fundraising conditions imposed by the Standing Policy Committee on Downtown Development and that the Council Motion of February 20, 2008 would likely be filed, meaning that there would be a 230 foot , 20-storey condominium building with a lot line of one meter, 39 inches from the actual private lot to the western gates of Upper Fort Garry and questioned if that was sincerely the best way to celebrate or to pay homage to the birthplace of Manitoba.

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His Worship Mayor Katz replied that the real issue was that the project cost 18 million dollars, noting that the value of the property that the City of Winnipeg was contributing was approximately 5.5 million. He added with the City of Winnipeg was committing 5.5 million dollars and the other two levels of government were committing 1.5 million each, and stated that everyone should be working on the challenge of obtaining a greater financial commitment from the Provincial government.

Councillor Vandal again questioned if a 230 foot high building was the proper way to respect the heritage and birthplace of the Province of Manitoba to which His Worship replied that the protection of the Upper Fort Garry historical site was what was important and Council was committed that this occur.

In reference to the City of Winnipeg's commitment of 5.5 million dollars, which is the value of land from the City of Winnipeg towards the Friends of the Upper Fort Garry, Councillor Swandel questioned if the City would get credit out of the Winnipeg Partnership Agreement for those monies if the project were to proceed; to which His Worship replied in the affirmative.

Councillor Thomas asked for an explanation for the contradiction between the announcement that there would be more programming for at risk youth and the actual reduction of the recreational programming staff.

His Worship advised that he believed Councillor Thomas was referring to his statement that he was very supportive of increased youth programming and added that he was not aware of the specifics of potential cuts.

Councillor Thomas asked where the programs operated out of Bronx Park Club would be displaced to when the club is closed and inquired how far the children would have to walk to get there. His Worship replied that he would have Community Services report on the alternatives and advise whether the facility would be partly or fully closed during construction. He added that it was important for youth to have alternatives as opposed to gangs who are hanging on the streets and noted that Council committed 43 million dollars for recreational infrastructure for that reason and acknowledged that it was a priority in view of the discussion of crime and safety.

In noting that the Mayor stated that he was supportive of using 18 million dollars of Federal funding for phase one of the bus rapid transit corridor, Councillor Gerbasi questioned why His Worship would not support the motion to negotiate a cost sharing agreement with the province in addition to using the recently announced Federal funding for phase one of the Bus Rapid Transit Corridor.

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His Worship advised that he spoke with Minister Ashton and the Premier's office to inquire if the Province would match the amount of money required for rapid transit. He indicated that the Province informed the City that the March 31st deadline had been met and that the Province contacted the Federal Government to state that they would like the 18 million dollars. He added that the City should receive 97% of the 18 million dollars, which was directly related to the amount of ridership as compared to other municipalities in the Province. He also noted that he was awaiting a response from the Province in regards to matching new money and indicated that the two year deadline to spend the money did not exist and the funds could be used when the project went forward.

Councillor Vandal asked if the Mayor had any conversations with either Premier Doer or Minister Toews about the Provincial and the Federal role in the Upper Fort Garry vision to which he replied that he had no doubt that the Federal Government would definitely match the Province.