EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE

QUESTION PERIOD

Minute No. 509
Councillor Gerbasi requested an update on the status of negotiations for the rapid transit proposal.

His Worship Mayor Katz replied that he had given the impression that something would be in place by the end of July but, in the interim, the City was building a business case for the investment and doing due diligence regarding land assembly and associated costs. He noted that it was an ongoing process between the City and the Province and that hopefully something would transpire in the very near future.

Councillor Gerbasi requested an update on the status of the testing and purchase of hybrid articulated buses. His Worship advised that the hybrid buses were not meeting expectations and lacked the technology required, and that communication was taking place to determine if the suppliers could meet the City's needs.

Councillor Gerbasi questioned if the City would look at some other form of environmentally friendly buses, if it does not purchase the articulated buses, and inquired about funding.

His Worship stated that the City needs buses and would have to explore an alternative bus type if it does not go with the hybrid articulated buses, noting that the department would report back on the matter.

Councillor Vandal questioned how the stadium proposal could increase from 150 million at the proposed Polo Park site to potentially 400 million in the Point Douglas area, and yet the ask of the Federal Government was reduced by 25 million, with a similar reduction in request to the Provincial Government by 15 million.

His Worship noted that when the proposal to build a new stadium came forward from Creswin it was a 120 million dollar deal with the Federal and Provincial Government each being asked for 40 million dollars, along with 40 million private sector funding. Creswin was also looking for land from the City of Winnipeg, concessions on property and business tax and was looking to purchase land at fair market value to build some retail to subsidize the football stadium. He stated that the City was ready to move forward with the Polo Park site, and still is; noting that after 18 months of due diligence and negotiation, the City's team concluded a deal with Creswin to move forward on the original site but the other levels of government have not agreed to the deal. His Worship concluded that he does not know where the 400 million dollar figure referred to by Councillor Vandal came from and indicated that the City does not have an exact number for the projected costs for land acquisition and infrastructure were the Point Douglas option to go ahead.

Executive Policy Committee - Question Period (continued)

Councillor Vandal questioned how all of the extra expenses for the Point Douglas location parlay into less money being provided by the Federal and Provincial governments. His Worship replied that this new deal was proposed as it was easier to get buy in for a 15 million dollar deal than for a 40 million dollar deal. He advised that the Mayor and City Council's job was to protect the taxpayers of Winnipeg and that the City knows what it was prepared to go forward with for the Polo Park deal and would not offer more money when the other levels of government were offering significantly less.

Councillor Vandal inquired if His Worship had signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and, if so, questioned when members of Council would have an opportunity to see it.

His Worship acknowledged that he had signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the Polo Park site and that the MOU most definitely protected the interests of the taxpayers of the City of Winnipeg. He noted that a MOU was anything but a deal and that, to his knowledge, the MOU had not been signed by the other parties.

In reference to the proposed stadium, Councillor Gerbasi questioned that if a different site, with different costs, different issues and with significant government money from all three levels was being considered, should that not be opened to other proponents to create a more open, fair process.

His Worship Mayor Katz indicated that the City of Winnipeg had very little, if any involvement and are merely spectators to what the Winnipeg Football Club decided, noting that the Winnipeg Football Club decided to work with Creswin and as such the City of Winnipeg was communicating with Creswin to determine whether or not it was realistic to do something in Point Douglas.

Councillor Gerbasi inquired if the Mayor would share the contents of the Memorandum of Understanding with other Members of Council to which His Worship replied that he would be pleased to do so.

Councillor Gerbasi questioned if the Premier and the other players had seen the Memorandum of Agreement and asked if negotiations were going well to which His Worship replied that if the Premier had not seen it, then his staff most definitely have as they are in possession of it.

Councillor Vandal suggested that the signed Memorandum of Understanding should have been at Executive Policy Committee and on the floor of Council and inquired as to when it would be seen for discussion, debate and a decision. His Worship confirmed that anything done by the Mayor, whether by dialogue or a Memorandum of Understanding, was all subject to Council approval.

Executive Policy Committee - Question Period (continued)

In reference to the Memorandum of Agreement signed by the Mayor, Councillor Vandal questioned how Council could approve something that had not been on the floor of Council and stated that if the Mayor had signed a contract on how to go forward on an initiative that would cost hundreds of millions of dollars, Council should have the privilege of seeing it.

His Worship reiterated that the only thing he had done was enter into an agreement to work with the Province and Creswin and explore if it was realistic to do a brand new football stadium on whatever site was chosen. He added that there was no commitment for anything else other than to open dialogue on the matter. He also reiterated that if and when all parties come to the table, any decision on the matter would be on the floor of Council.

Councillor Vandal asked the Mayor to share with Council exactly what was committed for the stadium at the Polo Park site to which His Worship replied that the City would maintain the status quo of no property taxes for the Polo Park site and that the City would sell some land at fair market value and would collect property and business taxes on any lands sold.