POINTS TO MAKE RE FUNDING FOR BIZ ZONES

BIZ ZONES play an important role in beautifying and improving our neighborhood Main Streets.

BIZ Zones tax themselves with a BIZ levy to contribute to improvements that benefit the neighborhood and the City of Winnipeg as a whole.

BIZ groups are made up of volunteers who are running businesses at the same time. They are giving of their time energy and money to improve our city.

I can't imagine how bleak our city would look without the decorative light standards, the Christmas Decorations, the flowers and plantings, the litter and graffiti cleanup, the banners that these organizations make possible.

This doesn't even take into account the many other programs some of the groups are involved in such as Safety Patrols, Ambassadors, Community markets and events.

I would point out, that the BIZ organizations which tax themselves and utilize volunteer energy, provide a huge range of services and neighborhood main street improvements that would cost us an arm and a leg if the city had to do this on their own.

I am here today to urge this committee to reinstate the funding of 400,000 for Image Route enhancement /Streetscaping in the 2009 Capital budget.

Many of BIZ zones have streetscapes that were put in years ago and need to be refurbished and others have plans for new streetscaping initiatives.

There is really no other city funding available to support these streetscaping initiatives and the BIZ Levy's alone are not enough to get the work done.

A similar program existed for many years when the streetscapes were first put in. Then it was cancelled for a number of years. It was great news for our neighborhood main streets when the $400,000 per year was reinstated for 2007 and 2008.

I have been trying figure out why the Proposed Capital Budget was tabled with no funding for 2009 in the Image Route Enhancement /Streetscaping line.

I would like to speak in contrast to the reasons put forth to justify eliminating the 2009 funding.

It was explained to me that the 2007 and 2008 funding was not being spent or used and this implied it wasn't needed.

Since the budget was tabled, I have confirmed that almost all the money has been either spent or has been committed to for specific projects. (all but about 50,000 of the 800,000)

The delay in some of the money flowing was partly due to the city's processes taking time.

The other reason is that some of the BIZ's are small non profit groups without full time staff and don't have the capacity to move as quickly as some would like.

That doesn't mean the funding is any less of a need or will be any less well used.

The BIZ groups have worked together with the city avoiding competing with each other and accepting the need to take turns for funding.

That cooperation was based on the city's commitment in the projected 5 year budget to have funding available each year.

It is unfair to these hardworking volunteer non profit groups to pull the rug out partway through the process.

There is a huge need for funding on an ongoing basis. Until that funding is approved in an actual budget (such the 2009 one we are discussing right now)...new projects can not be committed to or move forward.

Another argument given to try to explain this budget cut was that it was only a matter of cash flow and the commitment is still there for next year.

The reality is that the money is gone from 2009 and is not added in for 2010.

The budget line for 2009 for this item is 0. For 2010 and beyond it remains at 400,000. If it is just a matter of cash flow, the budget line for 2010 should read 800,000.

My view is that it would be better to reinstate the $400,000 for 2009.

It should be kept in mind that these projects are partnerships.

For the BIZ's to commit matching or supporting funds of their own, they need to know the city's money will be there.

The projected budget is always up for question as we have seen here with the unexpected surprise removal of the 2009 funding from last years proposed budget.

Non-profit groups, just like any business, need some degree of predictability to take the risk to move forward with a project.

Perhaps this happened simply because of a misunderstanding or inaccurate reading of how the money was committed, how it was flowing and how great the need actually is.

Whatever the reason for this decision to cut these funds for 2009, it is a decision that should be reversed.

I'll save the rest of my Capital budget remarks for the council meeting next week.