EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE

QUESTION PERIOD

Minute No. 419
Councilor Gerbasi questioned when the report on the water utility model would be tabled and when the Council vote would occur.

His Worship Mayor Katz advised that a Council Seminar was scheduled for the upcoming Monday. He further noted that a recent public open house was attended by approximately 200 citizens and was an opportunity for the public to explore exactly what the idea was. He added that a Council vote on the issue was likely in July and that information would be distributed to Members of Council as soon as possible.

Councillor Gerbasi noted that the approach taken on the water utility was perceived as more of a sales pitch than a consultative process and inquired if there would be consultation processes other than the traditional report to the Executive Policy Committee and to Council a week later.

His Worship stated that he had heard both positive and negative comments about the process and that he would like to think that everybody realizes that there was probably not a more open, transparent, democratic process than at City Hall where the public has the opportunity to go to public forums, committees and Council to make their presentation.

In noting that surveys have been taken, focus groups conducted, and web site information gathered to gauge the public response to the proposed model, Councillor Gerbasi questioned if it would be possible to have the data, in its entirety, made available to the public. His Worship replied that he had not seen any of that type of information but would look into it.

Councillor Smith questioned if the cladding of the Public Safety Building would be completed and also inquired if the City was negotiating for the former post office site.

His Worship replied that the City entered into an agreement with Canada Post for the facility subject to the City having 60 or 90 days to do its due diligence and then go to Council.

Councillor Smith suggested that the 4 million dollars already spent on the cladding project had been lost. He then inquired when an open forum and consultation about the new water utility would be held as the recent open house was simply displays.

His Worship agreed that the 4 million had been spent to date on the cladding project and that it was his duty to make sure another 30 or 40 million was not wasted. He also replied that he would welcome input on what Councilor Smith would like to see in a public forum or open house.

Executive Policy Committee - Question Period (continued):

In reference to the pamphlet "Flushing Out the Facts", Councillor Smith questioned who the new strategic partners were that would be approached for the sewage plan upgrades.

His Worship stated that he did not believe the strategic partners had been selected and that the motion Council approved was to move forward and seek out strategic partners.

Councillor Orlikow related that he believed the public would like the opportunity to ask questions of an elected official who has good information and was able to relate that information back and forth on the water utility and questioned if that would be something that could occur before July.

His Worship replied that he receives emails and has callers with questions on every imaginable topic and, if he were to get questions about the water utility, he would try to answer them, although those with the true expertise on the subject was at the open house. He added that the prime concern he has heard when contacted was that the City was selling the utility which was not the case and cannot be done.

Councillor Swandel asked His Worship to clarify if the water treatment plant was already constructed and operated and if it goes forward as a utility, would it be one hundred percent owned by the City of Winnipeg and operated by current staff. He further asked that was the conversation not about the City seeking a strategic partner for the sewage treatment plants rather than the water utility. His Worship confirmed that any proposed utility would remain 100 percent under City ownership and control.

Councillor Swandel noted that there was an ongoing discussion about special Hydro rates for people of low income and inquired that if the water utility moved forward, would the City be governed by the public utility board or would the City still set and control the rates.

His Worship stated that the original plan was to have the public utility board set the rates, an idea which still has merit and which protects Winnipeggers from future Councils trying to raid the water utility, something which has taken place in the past.

Councillor Swandel inquired that if the public utility board were to use its position to create social policy, such as the current debate in regards to special hydro rates for people of low income, would the Mayor still be supportive of the rates being set by the public utility board.

His Worship replied that the City was looking at setting rates that are fair and reasonable and if the public utility board got involved in an aspect of social policy, he would certainly look into it prior to supporting the switch over to the public utility board.

Executive Policy Committee - Question Period (continued):

Councillor Wyatt questioned if the Provincial Government consulted with the City at any point prior to making the decision to fund 12 million dollars for a sportsplex on the western edge of the City that would be run by an entity other than the City of Winnipeg; to which His Worship replied in the negative.

In noting that Council on May 27, 2009 passed Vision 2025, the GCWCC report for the future, where 10 community clubs were listed as top projects, with three of those 10 projects including indoor ice rinks being built, Councillor Wyatt asked if the City knows the impact on the ability of these 3 clubs to raise revenue, with there being only so much tournament revenue out there, and that this would be affected by the private sportsplex.

His Worship replied that the sportsplex came as a surprise to everyone and now that it was a reality, the City would have to figure out how to deal with it and what negative impact it would have.

In reference to infrastructure spending, Councillor Swandel noted that one of the troubles the City of Winnipeg has was in meeting the time lines for the stimulus funding announced by the federal government. He noted that the deadline for completion was March 31, 2011 and that limits the City to one very short building season due to climate and questioned if there was any consideration given to climatic disparity in order to give the City an opportunity to put forward projects.

His Worship replied that when these programs come out, there were always deadlines associated, but stated that when a project was commenced but not completed by March 31, 2011, he was confident that the deadline would be extended and agreed to confer with Minister Toews on the issue.

Councillor Swandel questioned if there were stimulus funds remaining and if there were infrastructure projects that the City would bring forward into a tighter time line.

His Worship replied that the vast majority of the 4 billion stimulus had already been allocated between provincial government and the federal government projects and many of those come into the category of P2's. He further confirmed that the City had submitted project applications.

Councillor Swandel questioned if applications for active transportation and rapid transit in the City of Winnipeg had been submitted. His Worship confirmed that there was an application for active transportation, an application for Stage 2 of rapid transit and other applications for roads and bridges.