COMMENTARY REGARDING THE CITY REPORT ON THE PROPOSED WATER/WASTE UTILITY

1. The public was invited to participate in discussions on "improving Winnipeg's water and sewer services - " a new management model for public discussion" (July 9 and 11). But no one came forward at these meetings to discuss the little information which was available at the time.

2. Statements provided a list of the benefits of the proposed "new model" were all matters which are currently within the authority and control of city council and thus do not require any organizational change.

3. References in the Report to the "model" include terms such as "could" and "would" (page 8 - discussion paper), i.e. possibilities but not necessarily requirements of the unspecified model. The only specific detail concerns something called "a new strategic partnership" which was being considered, but apparently not part of the model.

4. Details of the proposal were eventually provided in the form of an "Administrative Report". This is sadly deficient in that:
a) it provides no information regarding the source of the authorization;
b) it fails to indicate the terms of reference of the person or group making the report;
c) it fails to identify the positions and qualifications of the persons listed as "author";
d) it refers to something called "The Public Service" without explanation or elucidation.
e) in the Executive Summary, reference is made to a Council decision of November 19, 2008 to mandate The Public Service (unidentified) to explore the concept of a City-owned Utility. The Report is therefore not an examination of the advantages and disadvantages of a partnership model but a rationale for the proposal without examination of alternatives.

5. The Report gives some statistics of other forms of utility organization, with figures which purport to show savings as sums of money and percentages realized in those cases. It goes on to affirm that similar savings will accrue to an arms-length utility serving Winnipeg. However, no additional details are provided to substantiate the comparison so it would appear to be more aspiration than reality. Even more disturbing, there is no recognition of problems incurred in some of these other utilities, Britain and Hamilton for example, so that the authors of the Report looked only for favourable data rather than examining available data.

6. Minutes of the Council meeting of November 19 are quite clear. The majority of Council present voted against public discussion of the proposed "Alternative Service Model", which explains the lack of provision for public discussion and information and the farce of website pages and the June public meetings.

7. The above considerations raise a number of possibilities:
a) that Council is indeed, as is implicit in the body of the report, incapable of making sound and rational decisions with respect to large-scale projects and to complex matters;
b) that Council did not, and does not seek public discussion;
c) that Council has in recent years failed to fulfill its duty to maintain the city's services and infrastucture and is now seeking to place the responsibility on someone else;
d) that the real intent of the Report is to obfuscate the situation so that the 'strategic partner' will benefit.

8. Given the admission of incompetence on the part of Council, the ability of Council:
(a) to establish an effective and efficient arms-length utility;
(b) to select a "strategic partner", and
(c) to set policy;
are put in considerable doubt.
Council should therefore exercise its proper responsibility to the citizens of Winnipeg by giving full reconsideration to the question of water and waste disposal. It should meet the challenge by placing the matter before the citizens for open and public discussion before any further steps are taken.

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