EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE

QUESTION PERIOD

Minute No. 546
Councillor Vandal requested an update on CentrePort negotiations between The City of Winnipeg and the R.M. of Rosser.

His Worship Mayor Katz noted that CentrePort was a project that all levels of government had been working on and initially required three issues that needed address to move forward, namely, that it was a private driven initiative, that there be a single authority and that there be one jurisdiction with a board that had representatives from different areas. His Worship advised that he met with the Reeve for the R.M. of Rosser close to a year ago and they had actually agreed on how to move forward. Since then, the R.M. of Rosser had a change of heart and the City was now waiting on a response. Mayor Katz further advised that the Province was very much aware of the situation and hoped that it would be worked out amongst the parties so they would not have to be part of the solution.

Councillor Vandal asked His Worship to share what the potential infrastructure liability would be if the property was acquired.

His Worship stated that approximately 200 million was being put into CentrePort, with those funds coming from the Provincial and Federal Governments. He added that he was of the opinion that this had a negative impact on the City of Winnipeg. He advised that he had not seen any reports with specific dollar amounts.

Councillor Smith asked for an update on the status of the Public Safety Building. His Worship stated that there was an understanding with the Federal Government, which provided the City an opportunity to do due diligence. He added that due diligence had been completed by the departments and that imminently a recommendation would be before Council to make a decision to move forward or not.

Councillor Gerbasi noted that a recent Federal government announcement regarding the Waverley West Arterial Road Extension of Kenaston Boulevard indicated that the City would be responsible for $21 million and questioned if that money was allocated in the Capital Budget and, if so, in what year would the City have to come up with the $21 million to be eligible.

Mayor Katz stated that the project was to be funded equally by all three levels of government but the province fell a bit short. He added that the City had the majority of the money, with only a small shortfall, and advised that Corporate Finance was looking into the situation.

Councillor Gerbasi questioned if the project was a priority for the City over other projects previously identified or was the City reacting to the latest Federal decision of their priority.

Executive Policy Committee - Question Period (continued):

His Worship reiterated the priorities he had identified previously at the last Council meeting, namely, Water and Waste and Rapid Transit. He added that the Waverley West Arterial Road Extension of Kenaston Boulevard was one of the projects that all three levels of government supported with stimulus monies from the Building Canada funds.

In reference to Capital Budget deliberations, Councillor Gerbasi questioned if all Members of Council would have an opportunity to have a Council seminar very early in the process in order to participate in priority setting and be part of the decision making process since the City cannot afford to undertake every priority.

His Worship confirmed that he would endeavour to have a Council seminar as early as possible; noting that as with all of the priorities facing Council, infrastructure deficits had been discussed on many occasions. He added that when meeting with other levels of government, if consensus existed on one or two of the listed priorities, then those opportunities were grasped.

Councillor Orlikow referred to the Water Utility and asked for clarification of what was meant by 100 percent publicly owned. His Worship replied that 100 percent publicly owned meant that the City owned all of the assets, but may pay a portion to another party to manage those assets.

Councillor Orlikow further questioned if the other party would be given shares of the building or infrastructure, would these assets still be 100 percent publicly owned.

His Worship clarified that the City owned 100 percent of the utility and 100 percent of the shares and that he was referring to a management agreement whereby someone doing the job was rewarded.

In reference to a commitment made by His Worship that there would be no front-line service cuts, Councillor Thomas questioned what would be done to replace the two City run programs cut from Chalmers Community Centre and Morse Place. His Worship replied that he thought that Councillor Thomas had received an email response and, if not, he would ensure she did.

In noting that the City had had 12 or 13 years of tax freezes or tax cuts, Councillor Wyatt questioned if a tax increase was expected for the upcoming Capital Budget and Operating Budgets and further noted the need to reinvest in Civic Services.

His Worship replied that he could not provide a definitive yea or nay as they had not reached that particular point in the budget process; noting that the revenues and expenses would be explored, with a view to increased revenues. He added that many options would be looked at and they hoped to capture P.S.T. or G.S.T. from the province and other levels of government.

Councillor Wyatt further questioned if an assumption had been made that the goal was a property tax increase or if such a direction had been provided to the Administration.

Executive Policy Committee - Question Period (continued):

His Worship indicated that there was a process for departments to come forward and share information and for Council to make decisions, which were not always easy to make. He added that Council was looking at all sorts of other revenue sources and explained that a one percent property tax increase would generate approximately $4 million, whereas one percent of either G.S.T. or P.S.T. would be 25 to 30 times that amount and that this was where Council should be focusing its energies.

In reference to the N.D.P. leadership campaign, Councillor Steeves questioned if the Mayor had heard from any of the leadership candidates wherein they indicated positively that if elected Premier of Manitoba, they would eliminate the obligation of the City of Winnipeg to go through the process to eliminate nitrogen as a removal category for its waste water upgrades, which would cost the citizens of Winnipeg hundreds of millions of dollars.

His Worship advised that the cost was approximately 350 million and that the vast majority of scientists said it was an absolute waste of money; adding that it was discussed last week during question period at the Legislature by Honourable Jon Gerrard, and he hoped they would go back and take a look at it. He stated that he was dealing with the existing government and would be corresponding with Minister Stan Struthers to address a very serious issue; indicating that he felt someone made an honest mistake that should be corrected before millions and millions of dollars were flushed down the toilet. He concluded by stating that he had not communicated directly with the leadership candidates on the topic but hoped to get it on the record.

Councillor Steeves requested the Mayor to convey his thanks to the Public Works Department, on behalf of the people of St. Vital, for the work that was done, on time and on budget, over two years, on the Fort Garry Bridge. His Worship agreed that on behalf of all of the Councillors and the citizens, that thanks should be extended for doing a great job.

Councillor Clement asked His Worship if he would have a conversation with the two candidates for Premier about the sewer initiative noting that 350 million was the cost of the capital work but it would cost 30 million a year to operate. His Worship confirmed that it would be his privilege to do so.

Councillor Clement questioned if the Mayor would continue to let the Premier-elect hide behind the Clean Environment Commission when, in fact, it was the Province making the changes. His Worship replied that it was not his intention to let either of the candidates for Premier hide behind anything. He stated that it was his duty to make sure the right thing was done and, from the world of science, it was obvious that it would be a waste of 350 million in capital and a waste of $30 million a year to move forward, stating that he was prepared to fight for what was right for the citizens of Winnipeg who would have to pay the bill.

Executive Policy Committee - Question Period (continued):

Councillor Swandel questioned if His Worship was aware that one of the largest contributors to nutrient loading in rivers was due to agricultural practices outside the City, noting that other jurisdictions tried to acquire lands in the repairing zones along the rivers so they could green them and have them act as buffers for the run-off from agricultural fields and asked how much buffer land could be purchased for the $350 million.

His Worship acknowledged that he was aware that it had been very successful in other jurisdictions but did not know what $350 million would equate to in terms of the amount of land that could be purchased and protected with a buffer zone.

Councillor Swandel inquired if the Mayor would be surprised to learn that it would be hundreds of thousands of miles that could be purchased along the waterway, using a 200 foot buffer; to which His Worship replied in the negative.

Councillor Swandel questioned if His Worship could recall which Minister was responsible for setting the levels in the license, noting that the Clean Environment Commission recommendation was quite different than what the Minister put on the City of Winnipeg. His Worship replied that he believed it was Minister Ashton.