EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE

QUESTION PERIOD

Minute No. 156
Councillor Vandal inquired when the report on the new fire hall would be considered by Council; to which His Worship Mayor Katz replied that he hoped it would be at the February 24, 2010 Council meeting.

Councillor Gerbasi inquired if there would be additional cuts to WAPSO professional and middle management level staff when the 2010 operating budget was tabled.

His Worship replied that the goal was to freeze property taxes and possibly cut business taxes, noted that small business was the economic engine driving the city, but he would not support in any way, shape, or form, any cuts to front line services.

Councillor Gerbasi suggested that it may not seem like front line but eventually city services would be affected if the city does not have the professional staff in internal areas to do the business of the city and inquired if there would be further reductions in those types of positions to balance the budget.

His Worship replied that he was not sure if Councillor Gerbasi was referring to vacancy management, an ongoing situation that takes place all the time, but stated that those cuts were not being looked at as part of the budget process.

Councillor Gerbasi inquired if changes to library services, along with other economic opportunity report recommendations, would be considered in the budget.

Mayor Katz stated that they were not looking at any specific changes to library services but were working on enhancing service, with one of the goals being to keep the library open longer hours.

Councillor Wyatt expressed his pleasure with the upcoming public consultations on the operating budget to which His Worship replied that a great deal of the credit should be offered to Councillor Fielding, Chair, of the Standing Policy Committee on Finance.

Councillor Wyatt questioned if the concept of expanding public consultation to other parts of the City would be considered for future budgets in order to allow residents who reside elsewhere to more easily participate.

His Worship confirmed that it might be considered in the future but stated he could not make a commitment on future years due to changes on who would be back after the 2010 Election.

Executive Policy Committee - Question Period (continued):

Councillor Swandel inquired about the status of a Council motion regarding the creation of a stand alone agency to enhance and provide stewardship of riverbanks and waterways. His Worship agreed to take the matter under advisement and to get an update to report back to Council.

Councillor Swandel questioned if new fire stations would be conditional on provincial funding or could the City move ahead. His Worship replied that, to his knowledge, they were not conditional upon provincial funding and the City needs to address the issue and move forward.

In reference to the 2009 budget and the issue of ambulance fees / the contract with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, which expired on March 31, 2009, Councillor Swandel inquired if the contract had been renewed and, if not, when it would be.

His Worship replied that the administration had been diligently working to bring the contract to fruition and that the Premier had made it clear in a recent meeting that the Province was looking to see what they could do. Mayor Katz added that the departmental request for approximately $6 million would not be met but the department was looking for change to phase in over a period of time and it might take longer to reach that goal.

Councillor Vandal asked His Worship to share with Council his position on the issue of sick leave cash out for fire fighters; to which His Worship replied that it was negotiated long before he was elected and he had not communicated with the President of the United Fire Fighters of Winnipeg about the matter.

Councillor Browaty questioned if the Mayor was supportive of the current proposal by the public service to sever vehicular through traffic on Assiniboine Avenue as part of a tri-level agreement on Active Transportation being that it was contrary to Council's authority to formally open and close streets.

His Worship acknowledged that that he did have a genuine concern; noting that the residents living in that area had very little or no input and stated that he was looking into the matter with the administration.

Councillor Browaty requested that the broader community, people that run businesses in the area, and those that commute through the area, should also be consulted; and noted that it was his understanding that there was a very good, clean trail for cyclists and active transportation needs along the Assiniboine River at that location. His Worship acknowledged that when a change had a direct impact on citizens or businesses they should definitely be able to share their opinion, positive or negative.

Executive Policy Committee - Question Period (continued):

In noting that there had not been a potential funding announcement by the Selinger government for commitment of new infrastructure or diversified revenue dollars to Winnipeg, Councillor Wyatt questioned what the strategy would be if provincial funding was not made available.

His Worship Mayor Katz noted that the infrastructure deficit was over $7 billion but every government seems to consider themselves to be short of revenue to address the issues they have and, regardless of what may come from other levels of government, the City needs to be proactive and try to find revenues for infrastructure.

Councillor Wyatt questioned if the Premier acknowledged the infrastructure and operating budget challenges facing the City or did he refuse to publicly acknowledge that but privately indicated he understood the problems facing the City as it moved forward. His Worship replied that he had never heard the Premier say that the City does not have infrastructure problems.

Councillor Wyatt noted that Council, on June 24, 2009, passed a motion to call on the Province of Manitoba to fully fund the entire existing regional road and bridge system, as well as any future new strategic road and bridge infrastructure in the City of Winnipeg to an appropriate level of condition and asked if the question had been put to the Premier to determine if they could not deliver with regards to the request that came almost unanimously from City Council. His Worship replied that he would be more than happy to deliver that message once again.

In reference to the issue raised about Assiniboine Avenue, one of the projects partially funded by $20 million in federal money, Councillor Gerbasi questioned if the Mayor was aware of the public consultation process that had gone on and the design that was being done. In response, His Worship stated that under almost every circumstance, he supported the area Councillor on area issues, but, by the same token, if citizens called, he would look into any issue.

Councillor Gerbasi questioned when the report to choose one of the multi-national corporations that were short listed for the waste water upgrade contract would be considered by Council; to which His Worship agreed to report back. He also noted that someone with expertise to help the City stay on budget was wanted and that they had to wait for the provincial government to give an indication of where they stand as well.

Councillor Gerbasi stated that it was her understanding that Council had the authority to proceed but that the City was in the selection process for one of 3 contenders, and questioned if Council would likely see that in February or at a future date.

His Worship advised that the City went to the province but the province must take action in order for the City to move forward. He added that the City wants to move forward on time and on budget; noted that he would remind the province about the time parameters once again, and that the City would wait patiently until it heard from the province.

Executive Policy Committee - Question Period (continued):

Councillor Clement noted that some time ago the provincial government announced 50 new police officers for the City of Winnipeg, but that only 10 of those officers had been funded to date, and questioned when the other 40 officers would come on board.

His Worship noted that there was a commitment from the previous Premier for 50 police officers and they chose to fund ten officers per year, so that is 20 officers to date, with 30 to go.

Councillor Clement questioned if the officers were funded at the entry level cost of the police department and inquired if the City or the province paid the difference as the officers progressed in development and received more remuneration.

His Worship replied that the province funded the officers at the entry level and, a few years down the road, it was costing the City more than the province committed, which was a flaw in the past and that the City was working to change that for the future.

Councillor Clement noted that he had also heard that the federal government was providing funding for 30 officers to the province and, based on the assumption that 15 would be for rural Manitoba and the other 15 supplied to the City of Winnipeg, inquired if His Worship had any indication of when those 15 officers would come forward.

His Worship acknowledged that there was a federal government announcement for funding of 30 police officers; 15 for the city and the balance for the province. He clarified that it was one time funding and that the City had to address exactly what that means. He also agreed to get information on when the follow through would be.

Councillor Smith noted that the Winnipeg Parking Authority wanted to put 400 more parking stations out over the next two years and questioned if the building residents and businesses affected would be consulted.

His Worship advised that he had expressed concerns to the Chief Operating Officer, Winnipeg Parking Authority, about the parking meters and the public not being notified. He added that the individuals needed to be made aware, have an opportunity to comment and hoped that the Winnipeg Parking Authority would deal with the issues.

Councillor Swandel questioned if the federal money for the police officers had already flowed to the province; His Worship agreed to take the question under advisement.