EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE

QUESTION PERIOD

Minute No. 265
Councillor Vandal asked His Worship Mayor Katz to clarify if he was supportive of bus rapid transit.

His Worship replied that Phase 1 of rapid transit, from downtown to Jubilee, addressed a large part of the problem that existed for moving people on buses as quickly as possible. He further advised that he continued to discuss the matter with the Premier and hoped to come up with a ten year transportation plan to bring Winnipeg into the 21st century and access funds from Ottawa for light rail transit. He stated that in order to get people to leave their cars at home they should have something they would use on a regular basis, which would be LRT.

In noting that Premier Selinger publically announced that Phase 2 of BRT should move forward, Councillor Vandal questioned if the Mayor would commit to Phase 2 of BRT; to which His Worship replied that he would love to hear of a commitment for new funding from Ottawa and the Province.

Councillor Vandal questioned if His Worship would assure Council that Phase 2 of BRT would take priority over any new roadways in the City of Winnipeg.

His Worship stated that he heard from Council during 2010 budget deliberations about decaying infrastructure and stated that he would love to hear if Councillors had changed their mind and believed that the infrastructure was fine and that there was not a 3.9 billion deficit. His Worship indicated that he would fight to fix the streets and get LRT to make sure that Winnipeg came into the 21st century with a transportation authority and a transportation plan.

Councillor Gerbasi questioned what the Mayor planned to do to address the problem of rental apartments being converted to condos at a speedy rate; noting it made it almost impossible to find affordable rental accommodation and other cities had rules to restrict conversions based on the amount of rental housing. His Worship indicated that the issue was raised during budget deliberations and agreed to look into the matter.

Councillor Gerbasi questioned why Corydon residents were no longer getting a neighbourhood plan when Council in 2006 approved secondary planning priorities which included the Corydon area and pre-planning studies recommended further planning work was needed. His Worship agreed to arrange a meeting with himself, Councillor Gerbasi, the planner and the department head to look into the matter and get a definitive and accurate response.

Executive Policy Committee – Question Period (continued):

Councillor Gerbasi inquired about the status of the Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness initiative and evaluation report; to which His Worship agreed to obtain the information for report back.

Councillor Swandel questioned if His Worship would be supportive of borrowing money for the second phase of BRT.

His Worship confirmed that stage two of BRT was $220 million but he had yet to see a commitment from the other levels of government of their total share of that. His Worship added that for the first stage of BRT, the City borrowed the funds and the Province cash flowed it back over a period time, which was similar to what was done for Disraeli bridges. He added that all Members of Council would have to decide if they wanted to borrow for Phase 2 of BRT and if it was a priority.

Councillor Swandel inquired if a cost benefit analysis process was used to establish priorities; whether for direct capital spending or borrowing money for projects. His Worship replied that a cost benefit analysis was not done on a regular basis but long-term planning for infrastructure, taking into consideration the cost of maintaining the roads properly as part of the cost to determine what was needed to maintain the infrastructure, was trying to be done.

Councillor Swandel questioned what was being done in the area of an asset management strategy to ensure that money spent on infrastructure was spent wisely. His Worship replied that the Executive Policy Committee recently looked at and started to proceed on an Asset Management Strategy.

In noting that there was a 380 million annual infrastructure deficit, no cost benefit or asset management strategy or plan to address outstanding issues, Councillor Swandel inquired what would be done to address the matter and when an asset management strategy would be in place. His Worship advised that an asset management strategy never existed but was now moving forward and should be in place in the near future.

Councillor Wyatt further questioned when the asset management strategy would be in place; to which His Worship agreed to ask the department how long it could take once Council moved forward with a strategy.

In noting that in the past the Mayor was in support of alternate revenues, Councillor Wyatt asked the Mayor to elaborate on what position was taken for requesting alternate revenues from the province.

Executive Policy Committee – Question Period (continued):

His Worship replied that in light of the recent provincial budget he did not think the province was feeling very flush or in the mood to share what they have. He added that there was ongoing dialogue with the Association of Manitoba Municipalities and the City should continue to look for new ways to get revenue and deal with the issues because clearly the ones the City was dependent on were regressive and needed to change.

Councillor Gerbasi inquired if the Mayor had asked the province for money for the second phase of BRT or for other priorities, as a result of LRT possibly being built.

His Worship advised that he made Council aware at the February 24, 2010 Council meeting of a list of 11 projects that were submitted to the provincial government regarding Building Canada funds. He also stated emphatically that no one had the answer for where the money for the shortfall for stage 2 of rapid transit of 220 million would come from.

Councillor Gerbasi questioned when a study to show the costs of the proposed LRT would be available. His Worship replied that phase 2 of rapid transit is projected to cost 220 million and that the number was on the table and all three levels of government were aware of it.

Councillor Lazarenko questioned if the Mayor was prepared to put on hold the plan of LRT. His Worship replied in the negative and further advised that Council approved Stage 1 and it was currently being built. He added that elected officials should at any level of government explore the opportunity to have the best that was available and indicated that he hoped it would happen.

Councillor Vandal suggested that the Premier said no to LRT and questioned why the Mayor would not commit to phase 2 of BRT and move forward. His Worship replied that the Premier never said no to LRT and stated that what he said was if there was funding they should move ahead.

In reference to a Council motion asking for different forms of revenue from the province, Councillor Wyatt inquired about the Mayor's position and if he was in favour of a 1 percent municipal sales tax.

His Worship agreed that alternate revenues were needed. He noted that during the recent Council budget debate many people were upset with user fees and stated the City should continue to proceed with cost recovery. He concluded that if there was to be any kind of tax, such as that, it would have to be provincial wide for an even playing field.

Councillor Wyatt questioned what steps were taken to have a coordinated provincial wide approach to take the issue to the province and come forward with a clear proposal for alternate revenue.

Executive Policy Committee – Question Period (continued):

His Worship stated that the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, of which the City was a member, fully support the fact that they address the issues and come up with potential ideas that could be supported provincially. To be successful, Winnipeg cannot do it alone, everybody has to be involved.

Councillor Wyatt referenced a letter that was sent to the Mayor to establish the brain trust, the blue Ribbon panel and questioned when the Mayor would take action on the issue; to which His Worship replied that action had been taken.

Councillor Browaty noted that last week the city opened the new water treatment plant and asked the Mayor to advise what was purchased for 300 million.

His Worship replied that it purchased the finest quality drinking water in North America that tastes best and had no smell. He noted that one of the most precious assets that the City had been getting from Shoal Lake was now treated in the new water treatment plant. He concluded that they got major bang for the buck and the City should be extremely proud of that new facility.