EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE

QUESTION PERIOD

Minute No. 193
In reference to a request for additional resources from a Council colleague who has a disability, Councillor Wyatt asked His Worship Mayor Katz if he would be able to assist to ensure that the resources that the Councillor needs to be able to do the job he was elected to do are put in place.

His Worship replied that Council as a whole acknowledged the challenges; noted that every Councillor received an allowance and that it was just a matter of determining a reasonable number to address those challenges.

Councillor Wyatt asked His Worship if he would give direction to the Chief Operating Officer to find the resources necessary to resolve the matter as quickly as possible. His Worship advised that the matter had been referred to the Operating Budget and it would go through a process which Council, in the end, would vote on. His Worship also agreed to have a conversation with the Chief Administrative Officer.

Councillor Gerbasi questioned why the Administration appeared to be releasing press releases that appeared to be negotiating in the media, which she understood, was not supposed to be done in such circumstances.

His Worship stated that he could assure Councillor Gerbasi that the City or the Administration would always act within the confines of proper protocol and stated he had no doubt that was exactly what had been done. His Worship noted that any comments he made had been very generic and that they continued to work with CUPE and were going back to the table as per standard policy. He concluded that regardless of the entity, you always deal in good faith and he also acknowledged that he believed the City would continue to do so.

Councillor Gerbasi suggested that only the parts of the City's position that sound good and win the public support towards one side as opposed to the other have been included in the press releases. She reiterated that the City should not be negotiating through the media and asked for assurance that the City would not be doing that again in the future or at all.

His Worship replied that he represents the citizens of Winnipeg, not CUPE, and emphatically stated that what the Councillor implied was totally inaccurate and that the City of Winnipeg had not breached protocol in any way, shape or form.

Councillor Pagtakhan inquired about the status of the Downtown Residential Development Strategy, which involves homelessness, green space in the downtown, safety, tax incentives and accessibility.

Executive Policy Committee – Question Period (continued):

His Worship noted that one of the City's recent major accomplishments was the growth in creating downtown housing, which had already increased by ten percent, and provides more housing downtown, rental units, condo's and affordable housing. He also acknowledged that the two senior levels of government have helped the stimulation.

Councillor Pagtakhan agreed that Council definitely needs to be proud of what it was doing for the downtown but reiterated that his question pertained to creating a Downtown Residential Development Strategy and questioned if a strategy would be available within the next 60 days.

His Worship agreed to take the question under advisement and get back to the Councillor. He added that poverty was an issue that needed to be addressed by all three levels of government, the private sector and faith based groups. His Worship also noted that it was while he was Mayor that the City actually made the Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative a line item in the budget, which did not exist before and stated the City continued to move in the right direction.

Councillor Pagtakhan questioned if the Mayor was committed to creating a Downtown Retail Strategy; to which His Worship replied that he was committed to retail and also housing and multi-use. He added that every successful downtown had mixed-usage and that for some unknown reason that was not allowed to happen in Winnipeg. He advised that was changing and that people living, working and playing in the downtown was needed. The Mayor stated that a nucleus of people was need to create activity and once you have enough people in the downtown, retail would come.

Councillor Swandel referred to a possible flood situation this year and asked His Worship to confirm that it was important to communicate with the citizens that the City would be looking after all matters regardless of what may happen in any labour negotiation and, in particular, those that bring serious concern to the citizens and that communication to the citizens in that regard was of the utmost importance.

His Worship replied by stating that he did not think anybody sitting in the Chamber wants to see a strike but that they must be prepared for the worst. He advised that Emergency Services, Police, Fire Paramedics, and essential services such as watermain breaks, snow clearing, garbage removal, etc., would not be impacted. The Mayor advised that the City was prepared to deal with a potential flood, had started making sandbags last week, and would use everything they had access to, to make sure they deal with the challenges in the unfortunate event that there may be a strike.

Executive Policy Committee – Question Period (continued):

Councillor Swandel requested the Mayor to clarify if there had been internal communication to all CUPE members from the CAO's office that outlined some of what the City had put on the table but were not part of any public communication or public media release.

His Worship acknowledged that there were internal communications from the City to the CUPE leadership and with Councillors.

Councillor Eadie questioned if he would get some input, some dialogue, some discussion about proposals he might make to Executive Policy Committee during the Operating Budget process. His Worship replied that if any Councillor had a motion or a suggestion, he would be available to listen and suggested also that Executive Policy Committee and Council listened. He stated that there was a process that had been successful, continues to work, and provides for a Council Seminar, which is an opportunity to see the budget first hand, digest it and ask questions, and then the Standing Policy Committees meet to hear delegations, before the budget proceeds to Executive Policy Committee and Council.

Councillor Eadie asked if the Mayor could find a better way to allow non Executive Policy Committee members to participate in the budgetary process and work with the administration to set some priorities.

His Worship replied that if Councillor Eadie had anything specifically in mind that he wanted to discuss, he would be happy to set up an appointment to meet. He added that this Council had one of the most transparent situations of just about any Council in Canada, and that he would like to keep it that way. He concluded that there is a budget process, which some people love, some people do not, and stated that he would listen if somebody wants to talk about changes.

In noting that the Councillors Representation Allowance Policy does not allow him to employ his wife, or other relative as his assistant, as his household could financially gain as a result of that, Councillor Eadie questioned what the difference was between paying his wife some money for services and the Mayor's Office paying for the meal at Hu's on First on Ellice, which is owned by the Mayor.

His Worship advised that Councillor Eadie should take questions on the allowance to the Governance Committee of Council, formerly known as the Secretariat Committee.

Councillor Steeves read a question posed by Councillor Gerbasi from the March 23, 2010 Hansard transcript regarding 10 million in revenue from a lawsuit against the Province related to the gas and electricity tax, and asked if the issue had been resolved. His Worship confirmed that the issue had been resolved and that the City received a 5.3 million settlement.

Executive Policy Committee – Question Period (continued):

Councillor Steeves also referred to comments made by Councillor Wyatt on March 23, 2010 regarding 10.6 million from Hydro and questioned if the issue had been resolved.
His Worship stated that the issue had been resolved as mentioned and thanked the Administration for their work on this issue.

Councillor Wyatt referred to the189 million of Building Canada Funds that Council voted to set priorities for and questioned if the 20 million for bike paths was really money that should be ear marked for the City based on the City's priorities that Council overwhelmingly voted for.

His Worship confirmed that there was 189 million of Building Canada Funds, shared equally between three levels of government at 63 million each and that Council did move a motion on what the priorities were. His Worship confirmed that Council was still fighting to get those priorities done and was hopeful that something may come to fruition in the next 30 to 60 days.