EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE

QUESTION PERIOD

Minute No. 314
Councillor Wyatt noted that all three levels of government were supporting the 50 million Plessis Road underpass and twinning, from Pandora to Dugald, as part of the Building Canada Fund, and asked His Worship Mayor Katz to comment on the underpass approval and the status of the remaining ten projects endorsed by Council.

His Worship confirmed that all three levels of government, through the Building Canada Fund, were supportive of the Plessis Road underpass and twinning project and stated that sometimes things get done when there was an election; in this case a Federal Election. Mayor Katz acknowledged that the stimulus was Councillor Wyatt and thanked him for his work to get the project moving.

Mayor Katz also advised that it was just over a year ago that Council passed a motion with 11 priority projects where funding of 189 million would be used for major, significant infrastructure projects. He added that he hoped the other ten projects would move forward and that he would speak to the Premier to get the remaining ten projects approved and the money working, as opposed to having it devalued every single day because of construction inflation.

Councillor Wyatt asked His Worship Mayor Katz to elaborate on the inflation that a one-year delay for the remaining Building Canada Fund projects cost in terms of construction inflation.

Mayor Katz used 200 million worth of projects as an example and stated that construction inflation could run anywhere from 6 to 10 percent. Eight percent of 200 million, for example, would increase a project by 16 million. He stated that project costs do not go down and by the time approval was granted, one or two of the projects could have been paid for just on the money being lost due to procrastination. He concluded that all three levels of government were contributing one-third and that there was only one taxpayer so they should do what was right and move the projects forward.

Councillor Wyatt inquired if Jack Layton and his colleagues back in 2007 voted against the Building Canada program, the very program that now he supported for the underpass; to which His Worship replied in the affirmative.

Councillor Gerbasi questioned when Winnipeg would get LRT. His Worship replied that there had been many opportunities with the Federal Government to move forward on LRT and that he had asked the Premier, and offered to pay for his plane ticket to fly together to Ottawa to move forward. He added that the Premier asked for some information and they were now exploring that opportunity.

Executive Policy Committee – Question Period (continued):

Councillor Gerbasi asked the Mayor to explain where the money would come from to pay for rapid transit; noting that he promised in the 2010 election campaign that Winnipeg would be seeing LRT.

His Worship advised that he always said that a City with vision, who wants to build a future, should have LRT just like Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Montreal, Toronto, Ottawa, etc. His Worship stated that they key thing was the Province and the City had to be on the same track and there certainly seemed to be funding available during an election.

In noting that 43 million was transferred to recreation projects and 7 million of that was earmarked for a water park, when the rapid transit project was cancelled in 2004, Councillor Gerbasi asked about the status of that 7 million languishing in a water park fund somewhere and asked if Winnipeg would actually see a water park.

His Worship advised that the money was not sitting anywhere because with that 43 million there was no money coming forward from the other two levels of government; only the Federal money was there. Provincial Government money was not coming forward and the City of Winnipeg did not have the money, which was why it was done over a five-year period of time. He added that the 43 million was put towards the crumbling recreation infrastructure, one of the best things ever done.

Councillor Smith referred to the sponsorship program and questioned how many sponsors there had been so far this year. His Worship stated that he was aware of just under 2 million of sponsorship that came in from Sponsorship Winnipeg and that he was aware of another project that they were working on. He added that this was found money, was a very good start, and hoped much more would come in.

In reference to the public-private partnerships report from the accounting firm of Deloitte and Touche, Councillor Eadie questioned if it was usual or good public accountability concept to hire a consultant to produce a report and only be permitted to read the summary and not be able to share the actual meat and substance of it.

His Worship stated that he was not aware of what exact report Councillor Eadie was referring to but agreed to look into it.

Councillor Eadie advised that the report was produced to look at the Disraeli Bridge, specifically in terms of private-public partnerships, and asked if consultants were being hired to produce reports that could not be publically shared to look publically accountable.

Executive Policy Committee – Question Period (continued):

Councillor Eadie noted that Jack Layton talked about a fund for transit and asked if His Worship thought the specifically designated Transit fund would be something that could be used to accomplish LRT in Winnipeg.

His Worship replied that those were basically commitments made during an election and, until the government was elected, it was unknown what policy was in play.

In reference to the Building Canada fund issue and the 10 remaining projects, Councillor Gerbasi questioned if it was realistic to do all the projects for 189 million.

His Worship confirmed that only 189 million worth of work could be done and indicated that you always have to give a list in excess because you were not always going to have agreement on every single project with all three levels of government. He stated that there were several projects listed that basically covered every part of the City and many of them were priorities for City departments.

Councillor Gerbasi questioned if Council wanted the other levels of government to decide which of the 10 projects the City would get.

His Worship advised that Council listed about 3.8 billion of priority projects and this was a way to have 33 cent dollars. He noted that the City of Winnipeg gets 7.5 cents, Provincial Government gets 66.5 cents and the Federal Government gets the balance and stated they have to make sure to all work together on the projects.

In reference to Councillor Wyatt's unique approach, Councillor Gerbasi questioned if the new inter-governmental negotiation approach was going at the Provincial level of government like a pitbull in the midst of a political battle or would they be sitting down to talk and negotiate as equals respectfully with the other levels of government.

His Worship acknowledged that Councillor Wyatt took some initiative on his own, stated that he was happy (the project) was going to happen and that, as Mayor, his approach was to speak to the Premier on a regular basis, with Deputy Minister speaking to our people on a regular basis.

Councillor Orlikow questioned what Council had been doing to lobby the Federal Government to take advantage of this political time regarding infrastructure.

Executive Policy Committee – Question Period (continued):

His Worship advised that he, along with the big city Mayors and Federation of Canadian Municipalities, continue to lobby Ottawa. He added that one of the things they wanted to do was to make sure they made a long term commitment to Building Canada Funds and worked towards getting the amount received from gas tax increased. He added that when it comes to infrastructure deficit, they were no different than any other city and need all three levels of government coming to the table. He added that he was a big supporter of getting 1 percent of that 7 percent dedicated towards the existing infrastructure deficit and, depending on what the calculation was, it could basically be leveraged to about 2 billion and could have a major negative impact on a 3.8 billion deficit.

In noting that Councillor Wyatt had success with the methodology he used, Councillor Orlikow questioned how that affected the relationship with intergovernmental affairs, if individual Councillors lobby projects on their side. He acknowledged that Councillor Wyatt did a fantastic job getting his project approved and asked for some direction, as an individual Councillor, on how to get approval for his projects.

His Worship confirmed that the opportunity was there for every single Councillor to lobby for one of their own projects but confirmed that he would continue to work with Minister Lemieux and the Premier.