EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE

QUESTION PERIOD

Minute No. 610
Councillor Gerbasi suggested that almost 2 million in annual revenue stream was lost with the sale of the Winnipeg Square Parkade last November and asked His Worship Mayor Katz to take some action and share the original parking strategy developed by the consultants, the Director of the Parking Authority and the downtown stakeholders.

His Worship Mayor Katz replied that the Director of the Parking Authority totally endorsed the proposal to sell the parkade and develop other parkades in the downtown on the east side of Main Street, north and south of Portage Avenue and stated that he had not seen the strategy to date.

Councillor Gerbasi noted that Council recently voted to give the CAO the authority to negotiate a 30 year contract with Veolia, for involvement with the waste water upgrades, but the true costs or terms of the agreement, or even if the contract had been signed, was not known. Councillor Gerbasi questioned if the Mayor would give the public information regarding the content of the Veolia contract and expressed concern that a number of citizens filed Freedom of Information (FIPPA) claims to find out about the deal but had been denied through the process and had filed complaints with the Provincial Ombudsman.

His Worship clarified that negotiations involved sewage treatment rather than water related issues. He further stated that the Province of Manitoba was part of the process and that Council had approved it and further stated that details would be shared once the process was completed.

Councillor Gerbasi pointed out that the citizens had already gone through the Freedom of Information process and on to the Ombudsman and asked if the Mayor would respect the decision of the Ombudsman if they required more information be made public.

His Worship responded that he failed to understand the question and would like someone to point out when they had never honoured what the Ombudsman had said and that it was normal procedure to do that automatically.

Councillor Smith stated that he had confirmed with the City Auditor that the Mayor's Office expenses were not audited, acknowledged that assets were listed on the Mayor's web site, and questioned why the day to day Mayor's office expenses were not audited like the rest of Council.

His Worship acknowledged that he was a leader in transparency and was the very first elected politician to list all of his assets publicly and was the first Member of Council to put all his expenses on the website.

Executive Policy Committee – Question Period (continued):

Councillor Smith reiterated that he would like to have the Mayor's Office audited just like the rest of Council was audited. His Worship replied that everybody should be treated the exact same way so whatever the procedure was, he had no problem with that in any way, shape or form.

Councillor Vandal asked His Worship to share with Council and the public his position on property taxes if elected and if he was going to cut them, raise them, or hold them flat.

His Worship replied that he believed property taxes were extremely regressive and that people did not realize the detrimental effect on the working poor or others on fixed incomes. He stated that what they should be doing, as was proposed before, was looking at consumption taxes that grow, not a regressive tax as property tax and that one percent of PST would give the City a hundred and 30 million plus; whereas one percent in a property tax increase would give 4.2 million.

Councillor Swandel suggested that the issue was not taxes but revenue and questioned if the Mayor would be surprised to learn that since 2005 revenues increased by over a hundred million dollars annually in the operating budget. He also asked the Mayor to comment on the fact that there was a shift in revenue and taxes were only a small portion of what the City operated on.

His Worship confirmed that when looking at a budget you had to look on both sides of the equation, the debits and credits, revenues and expenses. He noted that revenues and expenses had gone up, but it was necessary to understand that there was operating expenses and there were infrastructure costs. His Worship advised that on May 31, 2010, the Infrastructure Council was appointed to look at new ideas for revenue, working with both the provincial and the federal government and that there should be a report within six months. Mayor Katz indicated they had phenomenal expertise on the committee such as the former president of Treasury, Reg Alcock, Chris Lorenc of Manitoba Heavy Construction and many others. His Worship concluded that the report would identify new sources of revenue and services to be provided that would basically pay for themselves through cost recovery and ensuring a move in a positive direction.