EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE

QUESTION PERIOD

Minute No. 36
Councillor Steen noted that East Elmwood suffered a big loss when the community centre burned to the ground and questioned if there would be funding in the Capital Budget to rebuild it.

His Worship confirmed that their goal was to allocate approximately $1.8 million to have the facility rebuilt and that it would be a much better facility than it was prior to the disaster. He added that he had met and spoken with the Province on many occasions about community centres and the requirement for more funding and the goal was to have the Province match the $1.8 million for a total of $3.6 million. He concluded that he was very confident that the facility would be re-built and that citizens would be very pleased with the end result. He further thanked the department for working so diligently toward this goal.

Councillor Sharma questioned the current status of the water pollution control centre. His Worship advised that, within the next 24 hours, he should receive official word from the department and he hoped it would be good news and that everything would be resolved and back to normal.

Councillor Sharma noted that the Mayor and Councillors found out about the problem by reading about it in the media and questioned what measures had been taken to ensure this lack of communication does not happen again.

His Worship concurred that they should have been informed immediately and that it was the responsibility of the department to let the elected officials know immediately. He further stated that the Province found out a day before the Mayor's Office did and that he had spoken to both the Chief Administrative Officer, as well as the Chief Operating Officer, and let them know that was not acceptable and there would be severe consequences if it were to happen again.

Councillor Smith referred to the National Freedom of Information Audit compiled by Fred Vallance-Jones, who wrote an annual report card and gave Winnipeg a failing grade. Councillor Smith questioned why Winnipeg had the worst record of Canadian cities in providing information under the Freedom of Information laws and asked if the Mayor was prepared to have that changed. His Worship replied that he had not read the report, but that he would make it a priority and report back with his assessment.

In noting that the Executive Policy Committee referred the recommendations of the Mayor's Seniors Advisory Committee to the Winnipeg Public Service on March 2, 2011 for report back in 120 days, Councillor Smith questioned when the public service would report back. His Worship stated that he would follow up and get back to Councillor Smith.

Executive Policy Committee – Question Period

Councillor Browaty asked what the City was doing to ensure that Occupy Winnipeg was safe for participants and onlookers and if there was any intention to shut it down.

Mayor Katz indicated that there was absolutely no intention to shut them down as it was not within the City's jurisdiction. Memorial Park was a provincial park and it was up to the Province to take action or not. He added that they were concerned about the health of everyone and donors were coming forward to pay to set up washrooms and the City and Province would work together to make sure that no one was at risk.

In reference to infrastructure funding, Councillor Swandel suggested that it seemed like they were in three different places at each level of government and that the City was the most accessible level of government and seemed have the greatest burden. He noted that he had discussed the idea of getting to the table a group of politicians and senior administrators from all three levels to develop a strategy for funding to get away from the political dynamics of bouncing the ball around and asked what the Mayor would do to get to the point of solving the problem rather than bouncing around between three levels of government without a funding source.

His Worship stated that he hoped all of Council would be supportive of working with the other levels of government and finding a solution. He added that the City, Province and Federal Government all have a role to play but that does not mean everyone was going to agree. He stated that he would continue to champion the cause and would have a meeting next week to try and do what they could but by the same token, just because they were not getting the response from the other levels of government did not mean they would sit by and do nothing.

Councillor Swandel noted that two percentage points of the GST for the City of Winnipeg would be 250 million and asked if there was a way to put the 250 million back into the equation, or even half of it and asked if there would be a commitment to get all three levels of government to the table to find a way to fund the infrastructure deficit. His Worship confirmed that he would make a commitment to speak to representatives of both levels of government.

In noting that the City of Winnipeg with a crumbling infrastructure had the second lowest gas prices of any province in the country, second only to Alberta, Councillor Swandel questioned if the Mayor would champion raising the provincial gas tax by five cents to generate 17 to 20 million dollars more of revenue for the City.

Executive Policy Committee – Question Period (continued):

His Worship replied that he would not champion a GST increase, but that he would champion getting the P.S.T. back that the City pays, which was somewhere around $12 million. He noted that the City already received a rebate of G.S.T., so the P.S.T. should follow and would have a significant impact. He added that he would champion the fact that much of the gas tax was earned in the City of Winnipeg and the City of Winnipeg gets very little of it back. The Mayor indicated that in other municipalities, the major roads were all funded by the Provincial Government and in Winnipeg, two-thirds of the population was treated very unfairly.

In reference to the development of green space and golf courses, Councillor Orlikow noted that the Expression of Interest, for over 685 acres of public land at a value of over $50 million, invited developers and golf operators to apply, but did not provide the same opportunity for the public or other interested groups and asked if the Mayor thought creative ideas would come out through the Expression of Interest process.

His Worship confirmed that the Expression of Interest went out and it appeared some very creative ideas were coming forward. He suggested that the department should finish their due diligence and then come forward so Council could make its own decision on whether there were some creative good ideas.

Councillor Orlikow indicated he was concerned that the initial proposal did not specifically identify non-profit groups, it only specifically identified developers and golf course operators. He indicated that he had been approached by numerous community groups that said they could not submit something in 30 days, which was the time that was allowed to complete financial statements and other items requested in the Expression of Interest (E.O.I.). Councillor Orlikow asked if the public would be provided an opportunity to explore alternative uses for the public lands before any land was sold for development.

His Worship stated that an E.O.I. was very different from an R.F.P. in that all the details within thirty days were not needed. He suggested that an Expression of Interest could basically be done in two hours because all that was required was to say we are very interested and have four or five ideas that they could elaborate and work with the department on. He concluded that the department chose an Expression of Interest so the creativity could flow. You do not need to hire accountants or hire consultants to put together packages.

Councillor Orlikow asked why the City bought up new lands for new fire halls and police stations when there was an opportunity to use land that already owned and exist, such as golf courses.

Executive Policy Committee – Question Period (continued):

His Worship stated that there were some major priorities for the citizens of Winnipeg and location was extremely important when it came to fire halls and police stations. He suggested that he would assume the department selected locations based on the amount of time it took to get from Point A to Point B but agreed to take the question under advisement.

Councillor Eadie questioned what the Mayor had done to try to prevent the loss of the Canadian Wheat Board which was based in Winnipeg.

His Worship stated that this was an initiative of the Federal Government that had been talked about for a long, long time and that they had received a mandate in the previous election to move this forward, which was exactly what they were doing. He added that he wanted to grow the City and create jobs, not lose jobs, and acknowledged that this should be a concern for people and that it was important to be proactive.