EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE

QUESTION PERIOD

Minute No. 172
Councillor Gerbasi noted that in November 2011, Council voted to bring in a 20 cent transit fare increase, over and above the five cent inflationary increase to transit fares, and that this fare increase was set to start in June and that the funding was supposed to go to Rapid Transit Infrastructure. Councillor Gerbasi questioned if there was any hope of reconsidering the 20 percent fare increase or cancelling it all together considering the fact that those who choose public transit are opting for an action that benefits everyone by reducing congestion and greenhouse gas emissions, while there was no additional fees put in place for automobile users.

His Worship Mayor Katz stated that Council approved the motion but the Provincial government would like to see alternatives and the City has until March 31 to see if new ideas come forward from the Provincial government. He added that he would be meeting with the Premier and, hopefully some new ideas would arise that might be different than the one already approved by Council.

Councillor Gerbasi questioned if the Mayor would be pushing to fund an alternative form of funding, rather than using transit fares as the source, and inquired about what options could come up that would result in a roll back of the transit fare.

His Worship clarified that it was the Province who stated they would like to see those monies come from other sources and the Mayor hoped they would identify them. He added that on a monthly basis, Council identified all sorts of potential opportunities for new revenue streams but the only one they really have control of is property taxes. He stated they need to work with the Province for everything else, and quite often need the blessings of the Province, so he was hoping the Province would do their diligence when they have said they would like to see something other than that a transit fare increase.

Councillor Gerbasi inquired if the Mayor would consider other potential revenue sources such as tolls, a congestion tax, parking fee increases, or a transit tax that all citizens pay, not just those who choose public transit.

His Worship replied that this was not an "I" Council, it was a "we" Council and any of the ideas put forward by Councillor Gerbasi could certainly be discussed. Mayor Katz clarified that all citizens pay towards transit; those who use it and those who do not. He noted that Transit has approximately 150 million dollars in expenses and about 75 million dollars in revenue, so the all taxpayers were subsidizing transit.

Executive Policy Committee – Question Period (continued):

Councillor Orlikow referred to the Golf Convergence Assessment in the Winnipeg 2010 Golf Audit and questioned if the Mayor supported the assessment that Winnipeg had too much green space.

His Worship replied that he believed the City had too many golf courses per capita for our population, as does every other city in North America because golf was not a growing sport, and the courses were not being used.

Councillor Orlikow stated that the Golf Convergence report was very clear and says that Winnipeg has an abundance, almost double the amount, of green space that other cities had and questioned if the Mayor agreed with the statement that Winnipeg had too much green space.

His Worship stated that his opinion was not to look at green space and the motion that came forward was about golf courses to determine if the City had a sufficient number or too many. He stated that there were many people who never had the opportunity to get on a golf course between the months of May and October and indicated that he refers to them as golf courses because that was exactly what they were.

Councillor Orlikow stated that golf courses were referred to in OurWinnipeg as "major green spaces" and “major open spaces" and questioned if the Mayor supported the Golf Convergence Assessment in the 2010 Golf Audit that Winnipeg had too much open space.

His Worship suggested that when it came to open space he wasn't sure if there was such a thing as too much open space. He added that a better quality of life was what it was really all about and to ensure there was a sufficient amount of open space for the public to enjoy.

Councillor Eadie questioned if the Mayor would try to find a way to get a park and ride built at Chief Peguis Trail near Henderson Highway to try to get more cars off the road. His Worship agreed to take the question under advisement and get back to Councillor Eadie.

Councillor Eadie asked what the commitment was to ensure that things were being done to take more cars off the road, find more money to fix the continually failing infrastructure and to make sure that when construction projects were done the proper facilities were in place.

His Worship advised that he put in a lot of effort and energy into addressing the infrastructure deficit and every Councillor should be fighting for more revenue streams to address infrastructure. He indicated that he would not get into a debate on whether you need to have less cars, noted that Council had spent money on active transportation and would continue to make Winnipeg an affordable, vibrant and healthy city for everybody.

Executive Policy Committee – Question Period (continued):

Councillor Eadie asked what the Mayor was doing in the advocacy effort to get the populace of the City, to let the Province know that a better way of funding infrastructure was needed.

His Worship noted that the City works with the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, who represented the entire Province. He stated they lobbied the public through press conferences, through advertising about the dire straits of current infrastructure and the need to find more resources to make sure the infrastructure was maintained. His Worship suggested that you were much stronger when you were united and begged Councillor Eadie to join in the crusade to get a bigger share of revenue streams.

In reference to golf courses, Councillor Mayes noted that there were issues about privatization and land disposal and asked where things were going so the public could be reassured that no decisions had been made and there would be a consultation process.

His Worship advised that an Expression of Interest was put out. He stated that the departments would assess all the ideas that came in, see if any had merit, and once they decided that, a report would come forward and go through the normal process. The Mayor assured Councillor Mayes that nothing had happened to date, that there would be public input, through open houses or whatever process there was, and that the departments were still doing their due diligence assessing the ideas for merit.

Councillor Browaty questioned if the Mayor was aware that originally part of the reason for a transit park and ride at the Chief Peguis Trail property by Douglas and Henderson Highway was to provide alternatives during what was originally going to be a sixteen month closure of the Disraeli; adding that Council, with the foresight of the Mayor and Premier Doer avoided a traffic armageddon. His Worship replied that he was not aware of that and thanked the Councillor for addressing Councillor Eadie's question.

Councillor Browaty questioned if the Mayor was aware that the opinion of a lot of residents in North Kildonan was that transit service was actually quite thorough throughout the community due to the way it was built and felt the biggest users of a transit park and ride at that location would be residents of East St. Paul, not Winnipeg taxpayers. His Worship thanked Councillor Browaty and stated that no, he was not aware.