EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE

QUESTION PERIOD

Minute No. 241
Councillor Gerbasi referred to the operating budget process and asked His Worship Mayor Katz what was the number given as the target for departmental reductions.

His Worship replied that departments were not given any target but were asked to see if there were new or more efficient ways, of providing core services.

Councillor Gerbasi referred to the $7 million that was set aside for the water park and questioned if that $7 million was still sitting in a bank account, was being used for another purpose, was still available, or if there was even an intention to build a water park.

His Worship confirmed that the funds were sitting with the City and, from what he had heard, an opportunity might exist that the Department was trying to finalize. He added that he did not believe something would happen by the end of March and, if it does not, then Council would look at alternatives. He noted that there were a lot of recreational facility needs and Council would decide where that money was best allocated to.

In reference to the 20 cent transit fare increase scheduled for June 2012 and the supposed discussions with the Province regarding an alternative, Councillor Gerbasi questioned how discussions were going with the Province and if there was some way to get rid of the transit fare increase.

His Worship confirmed that the Province had come forward and said they would like to find alternative sources of revenue and he had met with the Premier approximately two weeks ago to discuss this specific issue. He noted that the City had put many ideas forward of where there could be revenues allocated towards rapid transit and had let the Province know the deadline was the end of March / first week of April. He concluded by stating that he would send a letter to confirm and see if there were any new ideas and hoped the Province was working very hard and the City would continue to put lots of ideas on the table to find a good result.

In reference to Manitoba hosting the 2017 Canada Games, Councillor Mayes questioned if there was some way Winnipeg could cooperate with Brandon and put in a joint bid rather than submit competing bids.

Executive Policy Committee – Question Period (continued):

His Worship confirmed that Brandon and Winnipeg expressed some interest and indicated that he had spoken to the Mayor of Brandon with respect to doing it together and believed they agreed to have discussions with the Provincial Government. He noted that there were some concerns that it might actually cost more, not less. He advised that Brandon City Council would meet the first week of March and would make a decision on how they wanted to move forward. He also shared his opinion that he did not intend to compete with Brandon and that it was a possibility that they could work together, do a bit of due diligence, and move this forward.

Councillor Mayes noted that some residents contacted him about the death of Cal Murphy, Blue Bomber legend, and suggested that Council do something in the new football stadium to commemorate Cal Murphy and questioned if that was within the City's jurisdiction.

His Worship Mayor Katz replied that it would be up to the Winnipeg Football Club and agreed to bring it up when talking to the Club. He stated he would be very surprised if they were not already on it given the stature of Cal Murphy, who was one of the greatest coaches, as well as General Manager, held in high regard by other coaches, football players, general managers and the public at large.

Councillor Eadie referred to the recent stick used against the Province of Manitoba to raise bus fares by 20 cents for Rapid Transit, which many users in this City will not use and many are not able to afford. He questioned how the Mayor felt about this particular means that was tried to use against the Province, who clearly were not intimidated by it and may even reduce their operating portion if the increase went ahead.

His Worship stated that he, along with many Members of Council were successful, after decades of failed attempts to bring the Province to the table to fund transit 50-50. He stated that he did not know what the Councillor meant by "stick" or "tactic" and clarified that there was a motion on the floor of Council, approved by Council that came as a result of moving Rapid Transit from the year 2031 to 2016. He also stated that if you looked at the success of Rapid Transit in other cities, you would see phenomenal commitments made by the other two levels of government. He concluded that everybody was facing challenges and there was no level of government that was not looking for more revenue. As mentioned, a lot of ideas had been put on the table and, hopefully one or two of them would be embraced. By the same token, the Province had the ability to put ideas on the table and hopefully there would be a resolution sooner rather than later.

Councillor Eadie questioned how the Mayor was going to take leadership in building an impetus from the City of Winnipeg's people to demonstrate to the Province that Rapid Transit needed to be funded and not with 20 cents on the bus fare.

Executive Policy Committee – Question Period (continued):

His Worship stated that Rapid Transit was going to be a reality in April 2012 from downtown to Jubilee and that came as a result of the Federal Government putting approximately $18 million on the table and noted that he and then Premier Doer basically made it become a reality. He added that we are where we are today because of leadership from the Mayor and Council and cooperation from the Provincial Government.

Councillor Eadie referred to the 20 cent transit fare increase motion and questioned if the Mayor, the leader of the Executive Policy Committee, had asked his City Councillors to back off on the failed plan.

His Worship suggested you cannot tell if anything was a success or a failure until it runs its course and if the Province was committed to Rapid Transit, they would find the source of revenue that makes sense to everybody. He added that there was a deadline, six weeks away, and asked Council to work together to lobby the Province to come up with an alternative. He indicated that they were looking at 6 million a year, not a lot of money in the big picture when you look at how much revenue comes in between the Province and the City.

Councillor Orlikow inquired if His Worship had read the Pro Consulting report used by the Golf Audit report, which indicated that Winnipeg had too much green space and was being used by some Councillors to validate the sale of green space.

His Worship confirmed that he read the report from the department and if Councillor Orlikow was referring to a specific consulting report, he had not read that but would be happy to do so.

Councillor Orlikow inquired if the Mayor would guarantee that the Pro Consulting report that was available to the Auditors would be available to Councillors. His Worship stated that he would take that under advisement and report back to the Councillor.

Councillor Orlikow asked if the Mayor believed the upcoming Strategic Planning Session had enough levels of trust for all Councillors to believe that this would be a worthwhile process that involved all Councillors in the decision making.

His Worship noted that the whole purpose of the Strategic Planning Session was to get all of Council to the table and get input from everybody. Mayor Katz noted that this had not happened in decades and it was important to find out what was planned for tomorrow and the future. He concluded that the goal was to get everybody together to get input, have a professional run the program for the day, and hoped every single Councillor attended, came in with an open mind, and made a very positive contribution.

Executive Policy Committee – Question Period (continued):

Councillor Smith inquired what new ideas the City had besides asking for greater financial aid for Rapid Transit from both the Provincial and Federal Governments. His Worship referred to the school zone proposal, infrastructure deficit scenarios and noted that the City had given the Province all sorts of ideas about how revenues could be used, and the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, of which the City is part of, had also come up with ideas.

Councillor Smith clarified that he was asking what specific new ideas have been advanced to the Province to get more funding from the Province for Rapid Transit. His Worship replied that there was a list, with around seven items, which he would be summarizing in the very new future and put on the table with the Premier and would prefer to share them with the Premier before sharing them publicly.

In reference to the upcoming Strategic Planning Session, Councillor Swandel inquired if the Mayor believed that he would ever get complete or unanimous trust of Council at any time; to which His Worship replied that would always be his goal.

Councillor Swandel inquired if part of the intent of the planning session was to grow the level of trust on Council so Councillors can work collectively to meet the interests of the citizens and improve the City in a collective fashion rather than a quasi-oppositional fashion they seem to be currently working in. His Worship confirmed that was exactly the purpose.

Councillor Swandel noted that he had heard numbers like 4000 new hours of transit service were being created with the Rapid Transit Corridor and asked how many of those hours would actually be off the corridor and throughout neighbourhoods elsewhere in the City. His Worship stated that it was his understanding from the department that 4000 additional hours of services would be available in different parts of the city.