EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE

QUESTION PERIOD

Minute No. 442
In reference to a long standing national campaign from the Canadian Cancer Society and others to reduce the use of non-essential pesticides, Councillor Gerbasi noted that the Province of Manitoba was currently holding public consultations on a potential provincial ban on cosmetic non-essential pesticides and asked if His Worship Mayor Katz intended to send a submission or a delegation from the City indicating support for a provincial ban on the use of cosmetic pesticides.

His Worship Mayor Katz replied that he would be more than happy to send Councillor Gerbasi as a delegation on behalf of the City because it was something near and dear to her heart and he would rather appear before the Province on infrastructure deficit and funding sources.

Councillor Gerbasi noted that the corner of Portage and Main recently celebrated its 100th anniversary, mentioned that the decision to completely close the corner to pedestrians had long been criticized and questioned if the Mayor would commit to re-visiting the issue and try to have Winnipeg's most famous corner reopened to pedestrian traffic.

His Worship acknowledged that there were champions to get the corner opened, indicated that lately he had not heard any talk about it but would be more than happy to have further discussions and talk to the new and past owners who were still there.

Councillor Gerbasi noted that in the last election campaign the Mayor committed to deal with the blight of surface parking lots in the downtown and to creation of an incentive plan; she questioned if the Mayor would consider revisiting the tax structure to create a dis-incentive to using land in the downtown for surface parking.

His Worship agreed that surface parking could be a blight, especially gravel lots in the downtown. His Worship confirmed that the administration was working on a plan which was expected to come forward very shortly and also noted that there were several projects in the works where large surface lots were being redeveloped into other uses. He noted that it was easier to work with the large lots as there was more opportunity for good economic development and return on investment, which was more difficult for smaller lots.

Councillor Eadie indicated that the City was growing outwardly and noted that the Capital Region was growing as well, and that this trend was putting huge pressure on streets and supplying City services. He suggested that the City was removing, for example, bus service from the inner city area to accommodate the expansion of the City, and questioned when the City would raise new funds to accommodate the expansion of services rather than do it at the expense of established areas.

Executive Policy Committee – Question Period (continued):

In response, His Worship pointed out that buses and drivers had been added, the fleet was expanding and rapid transit had recently been implemented. He noted that they were working to finish rapid transit and continue it to other parts of the City and that the only obstacle was to identify revenue sources. He suggested to Councillor Eadie that they go forward and lobby the Provincial Government together.

Councillor Eadie questioned when the City would utilize its own revenue possibilities to serve the suburbs so that money was not taken away from the inner city; to which His Worship replied that he had not heard those comments from the Director of Transit and agreed to take the question under advisement and get back to the Councillor.

Councillor Eadie referred to the need to have pedestrian corridors near seniors' homes and asked when the City would utilize its own ability to raise funds to provide appropriate services and facilities for residents, rather than by shifting existing resources.

His Worship acknowledged that all Councillors were working hard to address the issues in their communities and fought and lobbied for the money they needed to get things done in their areas. He added that this occurred every day, as well as during the Capital and Operating Budget processes, and that Councillors also regularly work with departments and the CAO, the COO and CFO on the issue.

In reference to a number of young people who were part of the "Love Winnipeg" initiative and volunteered as part of a group of about 30 different churches across the City to clean up the banks of the Seine River, in the St. Boniface Ward, Councillor Mayes asked if the City had done something formal to endorse and recognize the "Love Winnipeg" initiative.

His Worship noted that faith based initiatives had occurred for many years and noted other programs that were championed including the 2005 initiative "Kindness to Everybody", where individuals would get together, go through communities and just help people, i.e., re-build / paint a fence / mow the lawn, paint a house, etc., to give back to their communities. He stated that he supported such faith based initiatives and would be happy to sit down with Councillor Mayes to discuss how the City could recognize these programs.

In noting that rapid transit was taken out of the Building Canada Fund request, and that the City was looking for a source of funding to complete the Southwest Transit Corridor, Councillor Gerbasi questioned if the Mayor would agree to put forward transit projects as part of the "ask" wish list for the next round of infrastructure programs.

Executive Policy Committee – Question Period (continued):

His Worship indicated that approximately $150 million of Building Canada Funds were used up between the Plessis underpass and the Convention Centre. He added that he had discussions with MP's and MLA's on the issue, but noted that when you were talking about a tranche of money coming forward every 4 or 5 years, $150 million each would not solve the infrastructure problems, with the infrastructure deficit at over $3 billion. The Mayor stated that the City had identified real funding sources to get rapid transit completed and referred to a motion that was put forward by Councillor Swandel and a motion put forward by the Mayor on infrastructure, both of which were both approved by Council. He added that it was important to find a dedicated funding source that was consistent for rapid transit and asked that all Members of Council help make the Provincial Government understand that this was a priority and to get a source of revenue identified.

Councillor Gerbasi further questioned if the Mayor would put transit on the list of infrastructure projects to be funded by a Building Canada type program if another source of funding for rapid transit could not be identified.

His Worship advised that Council accomplished the first phase of rapid transit, Queen Elizabeth to Jubilee and noted that this was not paid for out of Building Canada Funds. The realities were that the next phase of rapid transit could be accomplished with a little bit of cooperation from the Provincial Government. In the meantime he stated that they would continue to use Building Canada Funds for other infrastructure projects, including roads, bridges, libraries, community centres, the convention centre, sidewalks, back lanes and other infrastructure projects that needed to be addressed.

Councillor Gerbasi requested an update on the status of the Community Climate Change Action Plan, which was something that was talked about and was to be a piece of the OurWinnipeg strategy.

His Worship stated that the administration was working on a proposal and he was expecting a final report to come forward.

In reference to the 2.5 cent gas tax motion, which called upon the Province to put a 2.5 cent per litre increase in the gas tax towards infrastructure, as well as to the motion pertaining to a vehicle registration fee increase, Councillor Wyatt asked if there had been any response by the Premier, the Premier's Office, or the Province of Manitoba, with regard to those important resolutions passed by Council in May. His Worship replied that, to date, there had been no response to either of those motions.

Executive Policy Committee – Question Period (continued):

In light of the lack of response and, knowing how strongly Winnipeggers feel about the fact that they were paying the extra gas tax and registration fee, and none of it was going to infrastructure, Councillor Wyatt asked if the Mayor would be prepared to undertake a public relations and media campaign to get Winnipeggers involved to push the Province to make sure the money goes back into infrastructure where it belonged.

His Worship stated that the City was faced with some major challenges, infrastructure being one of them, and indicated he could not explain why the Provincial Government was not taking this seriously. He noted that the Provincial Government received $3.4 billion from the Federal Government and that the City of Winnipeg received a total of only $212 million from the Province; with the only real source of revenue for the City being property taxes. He added that property taxes were a regressive tax and that the City continued to look for growth revenues. He indicated that he appreciated the comment from Councillor Wyatt and would maintain an open mind, but would not give a definitive yes or no to the suggestion proposed by Councillor Wyatt. His Worship concluded that the pot of money was available, but that the issue was the way it was distributed. Sixty-five percent of revenues went to the Provincial Government, 27 percent to the Federal Government and only 8 percent to the City, and suggested that a re-distribution of revenues was needed.