EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE

QUESTION PERIOD

Minute No. 637
Councillor Gerbasi stated that a decision was made to increase the scope of the Fire Station 11 expansion without Council authorization and asked His Worship Mayor Katz how soon a report outlining who made that decision would be forthcoming.

His Worship Mayor Katz indicated that the answer would be in the report that would go through the Chair of the Standing Policy Committee on Protection and Community Services and then there would be an opportunity to question the people involved.

Councillor Gerbasi noted that the Premier stated that the Province would fund one-third of the next phase of Rapid Transit, referred to a Federal commitment to develop a new long-term plan for municipal infrastructure funding, expected to be rolled out for 2014, perfect for Winnipeg's next Rapid Transit project, and asked the Mayor to update Council on how the City would come up with their funding and secure other funding going forward.

His Worship noted that Rapid Transit was a priority and Council came up with about eight different ideas to fund it, which were sent to the Province to explore, and each and every time the City got the answer "no". His Worship stated that there was no real money on the table to date from the Province and advised that for the first phase of Rapid Transit, the City put up the money for the Province and they were still paying the City back, with it being a debt on the City books.

Councillor Gerbasi noted that the Mayor was the inter-governmental affairs representative and asked for his commitment to negotiate with the other levels of government for funding from their programs for the next phase of Rapid Transit.

His Worship reminded Council that the first phase of Rapid Transit was paid one hundred percent with City of Winnipeg funds and that the City gets paid back on a long-term basis, so they basically played bank for the Province of Manitoba. He advised that they were committed to Rapid Transit and there were many options for doing it. He concluded by stating that he would continue to talk to the Premier to see if they could obtain a committed funding source and that the City always comes up with its share.

Councillor Smith asked the Mayor to name the individual who authorized the scope of the Fire Paramedic Station No. 11 to increase it from 10,500 square feet to 14,000 square feet. His Worship advised that a report would be going forward to the Standing Policy Committee on Protection and Community Services and he would leave it up to the Chair to release that information.

Executive Policy Committee – Question Period (continued):

Councillor Smith asked why it had taken over two years to negotiate a new lease with Salisbury House; why that firm was allowed to pay the City $2,000 a month for their prestigious location on Esplanade Riel Pedestrian Bridge; what the final amount of the new rent was; and what the proposed rent was to the Salisbury House before the final offer.

His Worship stated that in an over-hold situation they continue to pay exactly what they were paying. He advised that negotiations were taking place and the department was looking to get several items including maintenance / fulfillment of bilingual requirements; obtain market rent, sign a five-year agreement and payment of all realty taxes. His Worship encouraged Councillor Smith to share the names of any other restaurateurs interested in that specific space with the Department.

Councillor Mayes asked His Worship if he was prepared to work with him to issue an apology or to make sure that garbage, recycling and waste collection was improved in the south part of St. Vital, especially south of the Perimeter.

His Worship replied that all constituents of the City of Winnipeg who have been inconvenienced and went through unnecessary grief and aggravation were owed an apology. His Worship added that an update from the Water and Waste Department had been asked for and he would be more than happy to meet with the Councillor and the person in charge from Water and Waste.

Councillor Swandel questioned what was being done to champion supportive living facilities that bring so much value, whether in the medical field or other emergency services, and asked what strategies were in place to ensure funding continued to be available to the most vulnerable people and that they were getting the monetary and social supports needed.

His Worship acknowledged the question posed about housing development in the downtown at the last Council meeting and advised that a letter was sent, a detailed response was expected, and preliminary information was that they were putting money into housing projects. He added that they were not doing the job as good as they should and if it was an investment from all three levels of government, including the private sector, it would be a much better, compassionate city and would be an investment that would save time for the fire paramedics and police. The Mayor advised that a committee had been set up through the United Way to deal with the poverty and homelessness issue, some ideas should flow through, and more transitional housing was at the top of the list.

Councillor Swandel noted that the City was in the process of building four new fire stations at a pretty reasonable cost and asked when was the last time that type of significant infrastructure investment had been made in fire and paramedic services in the City of Winnipeg.

Executive Policy Committee – Question Period (continued):

His Worship advised that infrastructure, such as fire halls that are almost 100 years old, police stations, libraries and community centres, were decaying and it had been at least 20 to 25 years since a significant investment had been made. The Mayor noted that money was being re-invested in key infrastructure and would keep citizens safer with quicker response times, would keep the men and women of the Fire and Paramedic Service safer and would provide training, so it was basically a win, win, win situation.

Councillor Swandel asked if the Mayor was aware that the last time all three levels of government were one-third partners in the A.T. infrastructure, was under the stimulus program and there were really tight time-lines put on and a great deal of criticism about how that public consultation was done. He added that a great deal of infrastructure was built but, the City of Winnipeg ended up having to pay about 12 million of the 21 million because of the way the criteria was stated and because they had to rush so fast to get in there, and questioned if the Mayor was aware of something similar that transpired through that program that was "gun to your head" decision making as a result of tight time lines put on by the Federal Program.

His Worship confirmed that due to circumstances beyond their control they ended up investing more but added that the stimulus was a one-time situation. He advised that the bigger problem was the Building Canada funding scenario where, quite often, the City funds more than one-third since certain expenses were not allowed, certain things changed during the period of time so it is never one-third, one-third, one-third. His Worship had requested that they change the funding formula to provide long-term guaranteed sustainable funding so they could then address many of the infrastructure problems and start right away. His Worship concluded by asking all Members of Council to talk to their M.L.A., to their Member of Parliament and work on redistribution of the pie to obtain long-term sustainable funding so Council, based on the infrastructure priorities, could work on a plan to redo the City and have it be the great City that each and every member of Council wants it to be.