EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE

QUESTION PERIOD

Minute No. 291
Councillor Wyatt noted that the Federal Government was bringing down their budget on March 21, 2013, and municipalities across the country, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, and big city mayors, have been lobbying for more resources for infrastructure and asked the Mayor about his thoughts with regards to the Federal Budget.

His Worship Mayor Katz replied that every municipality was facing a crisis situation in terms of infrastructure. He acknowledged that everyone was expecting to see an increase in funding, but unfortunately, whatever increase was announced would not address the issue. His Worship advised that the situation that exists today goes back 150 years when the system worked and the majority of the population lived in rural provinces. Now, the majority of the population is in the city, using city services and that is the dilemma. Mayor Katz suggested that the debate today should be money from both the Federal and Provincial governments going to the municipalities. He reiterated that 65 cents of every tax dollar collected in the City of Winnipeg goes to the Provincial Government, 27 cents to the Federal Government and 8 cents to the City of Winnipeg. He added that the figures have to change and if not, then the other levels of government need to give municipalities the power to tax.

Councillor Wyatt inquired if there was any effort in terms of the initiative by big city mayors to take the matter to the Prime Minister and say "enough is enough", cities are the centre of Canada's economic engine, and resources are needed to ensure that the economy would continue to grow and allow infrastructure to be renewed.

His Worship replied that he would not speak for all the big city mayors but, as Mayor of Winnipeg, he had done exactly that. He advised that he had made a presentation to Minister Fletcher and provided him the specific example that it was time to change the formula from 65, 27, and 8 cents to 57, 27 and 16 cents, which would give the City of Winnipeg close to another 800 million to address the problem. His Worship added that Manitoba gets about $3.4 billion in transfer payments, of which the City gets about $200 million. He concluded by stating that the money was there if someone wants to take the initiative, but if not, another solution was needed.

Councillor Wyatt noted that they had been lobbying the previous government for a number of years and, if the results of the next Federal budget were disappointing, what steps would the Mayor and the big city mayors take to move forward the issue forward.

His Worship stated that there had been many ideas over the past several years and no matter which way you landed, the cooperation of other levels of government was needed.

Executive Policy Committee – Question Period (continued):

Councillor Gerbasi stated that she was very supportive of having a Police Board, noted that there was an opening as one of the candidates withdrew, and questioned if more balance could be brought to the civilian appointments so that they were not only from the business sector.

His Worship suggested that approximately 80 individuals applied to be on the Board and Councillor Fielding would go through those applicants to find an individual to fill the opening and they were looking for people with different backgrounds. He concluded that the original seven recommended for appointment offered a good variety of people from just about every background.

Councillor Gerbasi stated that one of the candidates was the co-chair of a political campaign of the Mayor and the whole purpose of the Police Board was to help de-politicize the process and asked if the Mayor could comment. His Worship responded that Mr. Edwards was extremely qualified, having been the Liberal Leader of Manitoba and having introduced the bill to have Police Boards and further stated that it was very unfortunate that any Councillor would bring something like that up on the floor of Council.

Councillor Gerbasi advised that a lot of residents were very concerned about the closure of Zellers downtown, were speaking about the need for a downtown grocery store, and asked if the Mayor was supportive of efforts to secure a downtown grocery store so residents could live downtown and help with downtown revitalization.

His Worship stated that the initiative of looking for a grocery store was taken on by CentreVenture and it was time to find someone who was prepared to come downtown and believed there were members of the private sector who were prepared to open that type of establishment downtown.

Councillor Sharma noted that Winnipeg strived to be a leader in accessibility and universal design and asked the Mayor to ask the Administration to look into Concert Hall access, particularly the tunnel and the stairwell that connects City Hall to the Concert Hall, as that route was not accessible. His Worship concurred that the tunnel was not accessible and agreed to follow up and ensure some dialogue took place with the Concert Hall who privately owned the facility.

Councillor Smith requested an update on the status of the Public Safety Building. His Worship advised that when the new police facility was completed sometime in the spring of 2014, it would be an ideal situation to put some City Departments in the vacated facility and create more of a campus scenario. He indicated that if the facility was used for City offices, it would not have to be bomb proofed and would be less expensive to repair. He added that the parkade should likely be put out for RFP for development, with Council making the final decision.

Executive Policy Committee – Question Period (continued):

Councillor Smith questioned if cladding of the building would proceed. His Worship advised that the cladding was dependent on the use and a different scenario would cost a lot less money so it would make sense for Council to determine what would happen there.

Councillor Smith suggested that if those were the plans for the Public Safety Building it would be useful to do the cladding now rather than wait for the costs to go up. His Worship reiterated that it was a department recommendation and Council would have to vote for or against it, if and when it happened. In the meantime, the Department was doing its due diligence.

Councillor Eadie noted that the Access Advisory Committee had dialogue with the Concert Hall about options to make the tunnel accessible and, technically one of the problems was to establish an elevator, extend the building in some way, and questioned if the City could provide some kind of grant to the Concert Hall, who in the past said they could not afford to make that kind of accessibility happen.

His Worship replied that the first thing to do was to explore the options and, if it turned out the recommendation was that City Council should bear that cost, he would be happy to bring that to the floor of Council through the proper process.

Councillor Eadie questioned what the response was from the Province about being able to utilize some of the money deducted from Provincial grants for prevention programs for the City of Winnipeg. His Worship stated he did not believe he had a response and agreed to follow up.

Councillor Eadie questioned if the Mayor saw a bigger problem than just the downtown area in terms of having grocery options in the core area and shoulder communities. His Worship replied that he was cognizant of what Councillor Eadie was referring to and suggested that maybe they could come up with a model in the downtown that would work in other areas to create something that would act as a private sector incentive.

Councillor Swandel inquired if the Mayor could confirm if he had decided to run for Mayor in the 2014 Municipal Election. His Worship replied that as long as he continued to see progress in the City with growth and serious issues being addressed, he would be more than happy to run.