STANDING POLICY COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

QUESTION PERIOD

Minute No. 54
Councillor Havixbeck noted that staffing costs at the City of Winnipeg are directly related to full time equivalent and questioned how Council can pass a budget without knowing the number of actual full time equivalents (FTE's).

Councillor Wyatt advised that the public service was going through a position management exercise to sort out that issue with regards to the actual FTE verses budgeted and hoped that information would be available as part of the budget.

Councillor Havixbeck inquired about the approximate amount of the proposed tax increase. Councillor Wyatt stated that there will be a one percent continuation of the Local Street Renewal Reserve. Councillor Wyatt added that the public wants to see the local streets renewed and rebuilt and the idea is that Council will continue to build that fund over the next number of years so that in 25 years, if Council sticks to the fund, that will maintain all residential streets at good condition.

Councillor Swandel inquired if the Chair thinks it is possible that Council could deliver a budget that outside of infrastructure dedicated increases could have a tax increase of less than one percent.

Councillor Wyatt replied that at face value he would say no. He also stated that Council has unanimously approved contracts to various bargaining units beyond the rate of inflation so sooner or later decisions on where to find the savings or pass those costs on has to be determined.

Councillor Swandel extended an offer to meet with the Chair of Finance to determine if solutions could be found and asked if the Chair would be willing to be challenged by something at less than one percent.

Councillor Wyatt advised that from the beginning of the budget process the goal was to find savings without affecting core services. He added that he acts as the Chair of Finance but at the same time is a member of Council working with the Executive Policy Committee which is mandated under the Charter to bring forward the budget. Councillor Wyatt stated that the reality is that it is a huge challenge with regards to costs that are on the rise and to try and keep those costs and taxes down. He concluded that having an increase is a responsible way to go as it avoids down the road having a massive increase in taxes that ratepayers would have to absorb all at once.

Standing Policy Committee on Finance – Question Period (continued):

Councillor Fielding asked if he could find a way to not impact core services if the Chair would support an amendment to the budget to freeze property taxes, not including the infrastructure piece; to which Councillor Wyatt replied that he does not answer hypothetical questions.

Councillor Eadie suggested that the report going before the Standing Policy Committee on Downtown, Development, Heritage and Riverbank Management would impact the capital and operating budget and questioned if the Chair would appear at the meeting on Friday to speak to the report on the table.

Councillor Wyatt advised that typically different department come forward and make their presentation regarding the budget and he attends all the standing committee meetings and listens to the dialogue, suggestions, ideas or amendments being brought forward from each standing committee.

Councillor Eadie questioned if the Chair of Finance would appear in delegation at the Standing Policy Committee on Downtown, Development, Heritage and Riverbank Management meeting on Friday to speak to the report; to which Councillor Wyatt replied in the negative.