STANDING POLICY COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

QUESTION PERIOD

Minute No. 251
Councillor Schreyer noted that Councillor Gilroy brought forth a budget motion on Freedom Road but only six Councillors voted in favour of it and questioned if the Chair was sorry that only six Councillors supported the proposed budget amendment. Councillor Morantz replied that he did not understand the nature of the question.

Councillor Allard asked if they could work more collaboratively on the next budget and strive to have all Councillors support the budget next time. Councillor Morantz concurred that the process could be better but suggested that they did make some excellent steps in the right direction. Councillor Morantz suggested that it was a very good and an unprecedented process to have two non-Executive Policy Committee (EPC) Councillors on the budget working group. He added that they have not made any decisions about the constitution of a budget working group going forward or how the next budget would be planned. He also stated they would do their best to make the process as inclusive as possible and encouraged Councillors to contact him to discuss what the issues were.

Councillor Allard noted there were only 20 days to respond to the budget and some of the fees and taxes built into the budget were being voted on at the same time as the budget itself. Councillor Allard asked why scheduling was so tight and if the water rates could not have been approved six months ago and the budget tabled three month ago.

Councillor Morantz noted that in 2013 the budget was tabled on January 9 and voted on 20 days later on January 29th and the 2014 budget was tabled on November 29th, 2013 and was voted on 19 days later on December 17, 2013. He concurred that they should look to see if there was a way to provide more time for consideration. Councillor Morantz also indicated that they painstakingly went over many, many issues and analyzed policy areas and that just takes time. He added that there was no strategy to it being in March or December but, for the most part, 11 out of the last 15 budgets were voted on in March and that was evidence of how long it takes to put together a budget for a city like Winnipeg.

Councillor Allard questioned why they could not return to the system where the Operating and Capital Budgets were considered separately, giving stakeholders, the public and Councillors more time to engage in the budget process.

Councillor Morantz acknowledged that the statutory requirements for the passage of the two budgets were different, with the operating budget being the end of March and Capital at the end of the year that it applied to. He added that the requirement was to move them up together to

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address tendering concerns as soon as possible and, for example, significant funds from the operating budget flows into capital and it seemed like the best practice was to consider them together.

Councillor Mayes inquired if the changes made last November to the Committee responsibilities added one more committee with budget oversight; to which Councillor Morantz agreed to get back to him.

Councillor Gilroy inquired if the Standing Committees could take a larger role in terms of looking at the budget. Councillor Morantz agreed that could be taken into consideration.

Councillor Gilroy noted that Councillor Morantz attended a number of budget consultations in her community and questioned how those interactions helped during the budget process.

Councillor Morantz indicated that he very much enjoyed talking to the constituents in Councillor Gilroy's ward. He noted that they were very engaged and asked excellent questions. Councillor Morantz added that he also did a presentation in Councillor Mayes' ward last year and, so far, those are the only two Councillors who asked him. He stated that he would be happy to go and would entertain those requests to explain the budget.

Councillor Schreyer asked if the Chair would be advised that they cannot rush the process as it is the process that counts but added that it is not a bad day for democracy if all Members of Council do not vote for the budget, it is just a bad day for democracy if he, Councillor Schreyer, cannot vote for the budget.

Councillor Morantz replied in the affirmative and added that yesterday was their day of democracy and Councillor Schreyer had an opportunity to vote for the budget but decided not to.