STANDING COMMITTEE ON FISCAL ISSUES

QUESTION PERIOD

Minute No. 149
Councillor Wyatt questioned what the plans were for the current budget and budget discussions with the rest of Council to which Councillor Clement advised that meetings would likely take place somewhere in the third or fourth week of February.

Councillor Wyatt questioned if there could be a meeting sooner than that to discuss the state of affairs with regard to the City's finances to which Councillor Clement noted that the City was in a surplus position for 2004 and would not have the final numbers until the first week of February.

Councillor Wyatt questioned if Council seminars to be held on the issue would include the department heads and if there would also be separate seminars for each department to ensure good discussion about the challenges.

Councillor Clement advised that the Executive Policy Committee would table the budget and that Councillors would be brought in to allow for discussion. The budget would then go before each of the Standing Committees, where Departmental Directors could answer Councillors' questions.

Councillor Angus referred to the Mayor's recent State of the City address where it was suggested that the City has a 57 million dollar shortfall, that the business tax was going to be eliminated and that there was a possibility of selling off some assets. Councillor Angus questioned why Executive Policy Committee doesn't consider a group discussion to provide information on these priorities before it is said in public.

Councillor Clement remarked that the process was not any different than any other time. He further remarked that the budget process would proceed and that Councillors would be brought into the process in a timely fashion.

Councillor Angus noted that in the past, a letter had been sent to the administration asking them to reach a particular percentage target in their budgets and questioned if it had been done again this year and what that target was.

Councillor Clement advised that the Mayor had made it very clear that he doesn't want to see any tax increase this year and that the Mayor would like to have taxes frozen and documentation is being prepared to reflect that.

Standing Committee on Fiscal Issues – Question Period (continued)

Councillor Angus noted that Calgary, after three years of consecutive zero percent tax increases, had experienced multiple years of double digit increases and questioned at what point Winnipeg's string of zero percent tax increases would end.

Councillor Clement noted that this Council had been very clear that it needed a new deal to handle some of the longer term problems. He stated that he was lead to believe that the Federal Government was going to start providing funds as early as this year towards infrastructure and that there should be a document from them sometime between February and March of 2005. He noted that once that documentation is received, the City would have a pretty good idea of what it was going to get and would then have a document to go to the Province to negotiate with.

Councillor Gerbasi referred to the budget process and noted that several times over the last few years Councillors were brought in earlier in the process. She stated that what she was hearing now was the budget would be tabled and only then would Councillors gets a chance to know about it. Councillor Gerbasi questioned if Councillors would have a chance to discuss the budget before Executive Policy Committee had already decided on what was in it.

Councillor Clement stated he did not have a problem with having a seminar on the budget for Councillors but noted that there had to be some documentation available before the meeting was held and that the documentation was not yet available. He further stated that when it did become available, that meetings with Councillors would be scheduled.