

Infrastructure a ballot issue: MHCA asks the civic candidates

Winnipeg council candidates ranked funding core infrastructure and cutting the investment deficit as high priorities



Brian Bowman



Jenny Motkaluk

The leading mayoral candidates for the City of Winnipeg say they are keen to look at ways to access to new forms of revenues, tied to growth, to help fund the city's core infrastructure demands.

Both incumbent Brian Bowman and his closest challenger, Jenny Motkaluk, recognize transportation infrastructure's critical role in economic growth, and put a priority on ensuring Winnipeg's infrastructure can meet the next decade's population growth.

The views were expressed in response to a questionnaire the MHCA sent to all Winnipeg candidates in the municipal election campaign. Five of the 8 mayoral candidates and 22 of the 54 council hopefuls responded to the survey, which sought their views on the priority they place on core infrastructure as a policy and funding issue.

The responses returned by Bowman and Motkaluk said their campaigns make infrastructure a high priority.

Bowman noted that the record levels of investment made under his leadership in the last four years have reduced the infrastructure investment deficit. The 2% annual property tax levy would continue, should he be elected again, in order to invest "strategically in our roads, along with our federal and provincial partners, with a stable and balanced plan over the next four years to ensure that our infrastructure deficit continues to decrease."

Motkaluk, who has publicly opposed annual tax increases, said she would nonetheless increase funding to the local and regional street renewal program by at least \$11 million (the amount raised by 2% tax) each year.

She said she would support a proposal to strike a provincial panel to review options toward a new fiscal deal for municipalities. Bowman said he would push for a "growing source of revenue from the province and I am open to looking at many options to accomplish this."

"Core infrastructure always is held as a top priority of taxpayers and citizens and the responses overwhelmingly indicated that this is what candidates are hearing at the doorstep as they campaign," MHCA President Chris Lorenc said. "Some first-time candidates have a good grasp of why it is important to invest in a strategic, long-term fashion to ensure our streets, roads and other infrastructure assets are up to the job of positioning Winnipeg for

growth."

The MHCA asked mayoral candidates about pressing the provincial government to dedicate 1 point of the PST, in legislation, to municipal core infrastructure. Motkaluk said while she is not opposed to the concept, she's not optimistic on the success of such a bid; Bowman said one-point PST dedication is one, but not the only, way to source growth-oriented revenues for the city.

In general, the mayoral and council candidate respondents: ranked infrastructure as the #1 - 3 priority for the city supported continuing the city's 2% dedicated annual levy for local and regional street renewal saw resolving the infrastructure investment deficit as a serious policy issue supported the concept of a 'new fiscal deal' for municipalities supported investment in the Capital Region strategic transportation plan

Some candidates had good recognition of the value core infrastructure investment holds to our economy and to our city's growth.

Glenn Churchill, running for council in St. Norbert-Seine River, said the local and regional street renewal budget must be adequately funded to make headway against the infrastructure investment deficit.

"As a transportation engineer, I know the value a good road system brings to the productivity of economic trade partners within Winnipeg and the surrounding areas. It is vital to the health of our city and more needs to be done to help offset detrimental effects poor infrastructure has on city residents and business."

Further, he noted: "Sewer infrastructure has an even larger deficit. This work is not front and centre because it isn't visible. It's not a "sexy" topic that allows for impressive press conferences. But this needs to be addressed. Currently, the city receives no funding from other government sources for this need. Both the provincial and the federal governments need to be pressed on this issue to secure funding for continuing (combined sewer overflow) work and upgrades to the city's sewer infrastructure."

Jeff Palmer, a city planner running in Ft. Rouge-East Ft. Garry, said Winnipeg "has benefitted from many recent strategic investments. Long overdue, we are today replacing our infrastructure at a rapid rate."

Palmer and other candidates stressed that infrastructure planning and investment must consider all modes of transportation, including transit, pedestrian and cycling.

"We need to ensure that these investments in our infrastructure reflect the way we want to live in the future," Palmer noted.