

Dissent in the air but Budget passes

By: [Aldo Santin](#) | Posted: 03/20/2019 7:00 PM

Winnipeg Mayor Brian Bowman calls the first budget of his second term "a balanced and responsible blueprint" — a sentiment not shared by one-third of city council. Council approved the 2019 budget Wednesday by a vote of 11-5. The plan consists of a \$1.22-billion operating budget that will increase property taxes by 2.33 per cent for the fifth consecutive year, and a capital budget of \$367.5 million.

Winnipeg mayor Brian Bowman addresses city council just before a vote on the 2019 budget which passed by an 11-5 margin, Tuesday.

"Each budget year is a challenge, as requests for funds inevitably outstrip the availability of funds," finance chairman Coun. Scott Gillingham told council as he introduced the budget. "The aim is always to present a responsible budget that funds the services citizens of our great city needs while keeping property taxes, rates and fees affordable. "Overall, the 2019 budget strikes the balance between discipline, addressing immediate priorities and continuing to invest in key services and infrastructure."

The operating and capital budgets were largely unchanged from the document tabled March 1 by Gillingham and Bowman. The only amendment proposed during the meeting came from Couns. Ross Eadie and Jason Schreyer, who advocated borrowing \$10 million for local street work — as a partial replacement of the \$20-million cut in 2019 as a result of a funding dispute with the provincial government.

The additional borrowing proposal was defeated, 13-3 vote, with Coun. Jeff Browaty joining Eadie and Schreyer in support of the amendment.

Coun. Janice Lukes used her time during the debate to criticize the budget process, which involved only nine members of council as members of the working group, and called on the seven other councillors to cast a symbolic vote against the budget.

Couns. Kevin Klein, Shawn Nason, Schreyer and Eadie joined Lukes in protest.

"I didn't vote against the good things in the budget, but I certainly voted against the lack of long-term thinking that is required to achieve fair city financing of the services we all need for our families," Eadie said later, in a statement.

While Coun. Vivian Santos voted in favour of the budget, she used her time in the debate to deplore the city's lack of infrastructure investment in the North End and her Point Douglas ward, explaining more projects are being built in other areas of the city to the detriment of north Winnipeg.

Wednesday also featured an appeal from Chris Lorenc, president of the Manitoba Heavy Construction Association, to temporarily allocate \$20 million of the city's \$2.5 billion in anticipated revenues for local street renewals, and then repay that money with the \$40 million or more the city will receive from the Canadian government in a bonus gas tax payment (announced in Tuesday's federal budget).

Gillingham ruled the move out, calling it "premature" to spend money the city hadn't yet received. Bowman called the 2019 budget "a balanced and responsible blueprint... A plan that keeps property taxes affordable for Winnipeg families, while maintaining and investing in key infrastructure, services and technology that are important to Winnipeggers and are essential to building our city."

The mayor later told reporters he would like to spend some of the bonus \$40 million from Ottawa on local streets, but said there would be other projects where the funds could be allocated. Bowman also said it might be difficult or impractical to allocate any part of that money this year, if the funds don't arrive until May or later.

In a question-and-answer exchange with reporters, the mayor expressed dismay five councillors voted against the budget and its low-income bus pass, freeze on transit fares, and a host of other initiatives.

"Despite some challenges, this year's budget does a lot of good things for the city."

In favour — Mayor Brian Bowman and Counc. Matt Allard, Jeff Browaty, Markus Chambers, Scott Gillingham, Cindy Gilroy, Brian Mayes, John Orlikow, Sherri Rollins, Vivian Santos, Devi Sharma

Opposed — Counc. Ross Eadie, Kevin Klein, Janice Lukes, Shawn Nason, Jason Schreyer