

# City councillor jousts with Mayor over staff salaries

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Coun. Janice Lukes (Waverley West). PHOTO BY KEVIN KING /Kevin King/Winnipeg Sun

Winnipeg City Councillor Janice Lukes (Waverley West) jousts with Mayor Brian Bowman over staff salaries during question period at Thursday's meeting of council.

Lukes, along with other Winnipeg city councillors, receives \$84,924 annually to cover the cost of an executive assistant and all other office expenses. The mayor's office, which includes multiple staff members, has an annual operating budget of around \$1.8 million. In 2020, Bowman underspent his office budget, returning \$166,603 to City coffers. The combined 2020 cost for mayoral staff salaries was \$740,889.

Lukes said it's unfair that members of the mayor's staff have received robust salary increases, while city councillors – she says – are dealing with high staff turnover rates caused by lower wages and high workload.

“Recently the public service produced a report identifying City of Winnipeg councillors receive the lowest office funding support of all major cities in Canada,” she told Bowman through Council Speaker Devi Sharma. “It was also noted that councillor offices have experienced a 50% turnover of staff in this current term.”

Recently, Lukes explained, the City's Governance Committee sent a motion to the Mayor's Executive Policy Committee (EPC) to review office funding for councillors with the goal of reducing staff turnover and providing improved customer service to residents.

“But the mayor was the only member of EPC who voted against the motion,” she said. “Madam speaker, between 2017 and 2020 the mayor’s director of communication received a 46.5% increase in salary. My question to the mayor is – can you share with the public what the justification is for a 46.5% increase in salary over three years?”

Bowman responded, saying the raise was related to increased responsibilities due to consolidation of the director’s responsibilities, adding he is very proud of his staff for their efforts. He said he understands Lukes’ position when it comes to office budgets.

“She is often repeating that now on various topics,” he said. “I’m certainly open to considering the requests, and I know her effort and yours madam speaker. What I didn’t see in the matter before us was that those funds would be dedicated for staffing as has been made public and the rationale behind that. So certainly something I think is open to discussion and consideration going forward.”

Lukes fired back, saying Bowman has given other mayoral staff significant salary increases. She said the mayor’s operations manager received a 43% salary increase, while four other staffers averaged an 18.6% wage increase between 2017 and 2020.

“Again, the question is, can you share with taxpayers for these individuals what the justification is for these significant salary increases?” she said.

Bowman responded in part, “I’m not going to get into discussing individual personnel matters on the floor of council, but what I will say, madam speaker, is that our staff, and also the executive assistants for the members of council, I think do amazing work.”