



“BEST PRACTICES” OR “BENEFICIAL PRACTICES”?

As a citizen and taxpayer living in the City of Winnipeg I feel it is necessary to respond to the article that appeared in the Saturday, December 1st authored by Mr. Peter Holle, President of the Frontier Centre for Public Policy entitled “Are we getting what we pay for”?

Although Mr. Holle’s comments seem to be all over the map, there are few point that he makes that requires further clarification.

Every municipality across this country are creatures of both provincial and federal legislation. When Mr. Holle mentions a broad issue such as poor public disclosure it should be followed up by some suggestions for improving such existing processes. Every municipality has different processes in place for the sharing of such information. The best possible place to share such information is through the various yearly budget processes. As a citizen it is my responsibility to pay municipal taxes. As such it is also my right as a “stakeholder” to know where my taxes are being spent. If the Frontier Centre for Public Policy were really interested in public disclosure why would they not be lobbying municipal councils for more public workshops or town hall meetings as a mechanism of sharing such information?

In terms of archaic accounting practises, Mr. Holle obviously in unaware of the legislated accounting practices that govern all municipalities. One might suggest that his “Think Tank” organization do a little research before making such statements in the future.

Mr. Holle paints all municipalities as having vast performance differences yet provides no concrete research on how his organization reached these conclusions. Every municipality provides a wide range of services to their citizens. What services are provided may vary from city to city but is always based on what the citizens of that community require, not what is on the wish list for the Frontier Centre for Public Policy. Making such statements when comparing

apples to oranges does not add anything positive to possible solutions to the current infrastructure deficit.

It is very comforting to know that Mr. Holle is a paid lobbyist for the private sector and not an elected municipal councillor. I cannot imagine any municipal councillor blaming a growing \$123 billion national infrastructure crisis on information gaps. It is further astounding to hear that any municipalities that provide a broad range of services beyond core services tend to spend more. How much extensive research was undertaken to quantify that statement? As a citizen of the City of Winnipeg I was always under the misguided principle that I paid municipal taxes so we could have the municipality provide access to the public to such services as swimming pools, arenas, golf courses, animal control and library services at reasonable rates. As such I did not know that by enjoying these services I was contributing to the Winnipeg infrastructure deficit. Whether the service has to do with providing quality drinking water or providing swimming lessons, the employees who provide these services “exceed industry best practices” in terms of their qualifications. This is how the Frontier Centre for Public Policy should be measuring the many services that are provided by the City of Winnipeg.

Mr. Holle also believes that the silver bullet to the infrastructure problem is to put more citizen tax dollars into the pockets of the privateers through such initiatives such as P3 projects. These are not solutions, they are just initiatives that take longer to pay off and at increased rates rather than more traditional funding options. Why should we as citizens of this great city be lining the pockets of the privateers over a 25 or 30 year period when as a municipality we can borrow the money at less than what we are paying the private sector to fund the project? The point is that municipalities should not be eliminating vital services to increase spending on our crumbling infrastructure when the most senior level of government is issuing tax rebates.

The writer agrees that the services that municipalities provide underpin our way of life. But instead of comparing us on a “Best Practices” basis maybe we should think outside the box and doing these comparisons on a “Beneficial Practices” basis which includes all citizens that pay taxes, not just the people that can afford to pay the increased user fees.

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Go to <http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/subscriber/westview/story/4086771p-4685355c.html> to

view the article “Are we getting what we pay for”?

by Peter Holle, Sat Dec 1 2007, Winnipeg Free Press