

Calgary council tackles touchy topics before break

\$22M bridge, parking among agenda items

BY GWENDOLYN RICHARDS, CALGARY HERALD JULY 27, 2009



Pedestrians and cyclists are shown on the footbridge from Prince's Island Park, which crosses the Bow River and Memorial Drive. Another proposed \$22-million footbridge is among the contentious issues council will discuss today prior to its summer break.

Photograph by: Ted Jacob, Calgary Herald

CALGARY - The final day of council before summer break will be busy and full of heated debate as aldermen are set to rehash some contentious issues today.

Among the topics up for discussion are reduced parking fees for drivers who buy transit passes, pay-as-you-throw garbage, rezoning for a methadone clinic and naming a controversial \$22-million bridge over the Bow River.

Some aldermen were optimistic a thin agenda for the last meeting before the August break should mean a quick day.

Others were less likely to agree, noting issues such as the cost for drivers at park-and-ride lots have resulted in extensive debate before.

Ald. Bob Hawkesworth said it is hard to say what kind of response he will get to his proposal to lower the daily fee at park-and-ride lots for those who buy a monthly transit pass.

But since he is not asking council to reconsider the issue for the 2009 budget--instead, he is calling for a report to look at the issue and how it could affect revenues for Calgary Transit--he said he is not anticipating a lot of difficulty.

"At this point, I'm asking for information around the idea," he said Sunday. "I'm optimistic council will approve it."

Ald. Ray Jones said if council had voted against the parking fee to begin with, there would be no need to continue trying to revamp it to make it more palatable.

"There was a better way to do it," he said.

Perhaps the most heated discussion will arise from naming the new pedestrian bridge over the Bow River, which has remained a controversial undertaking since it was announced.

The name of the \$22-million structure -- reported to look like a red-and-white spring with glass canopy -- will honour Canada's Armed Forces, Bronconnier said on the weekend.

Some aldermen agreed the name should pay respect to Canadian Forces but continued to blast the bridge designed by celebrated architect Santiago Calatrava.

"If we want to honour the troops, we just have to rename one of the current bridges we have rather than build a \$22-million bridge no one wants or needs," said Ald. Ric McIver. "This is a ploy to sell a project nobody wants."

Hawkesworth said he was aware Bronconnier was contemplating a bridge name that relates to the armed forces--something he said was "appropriate" considering its connection to Memorial Drive.

However, he noted, it could serve as initiative for renewed debate over the bridge.

"It seems the pedestrian bridge is a lightning rod for debate. I guess it's like waving a red flag to some people," he said.

Jones agreed but said there is no going back at this point.

"It's already been tendered. It's already been designed," he said.

Meanwhile, McIver is set to bring forward a motion during today's meeting regarding garbage and recycling pickup.

The so-called "pay-as-you-throw" program is aimed at limiting the number of bags of trash Calgarians can toss per week in an effort to encourage recycling.

McIver said he hopes council will look at what's best for the environment and citizens now, rather than "waiting three years before taking action."

He previously said he wants the city to consider alternating weeks for garbage and recycling pickups to

save money.

Jones predicts there will be some debate on McIver's motion, saying he agrees with some of what his colleague is calling for, but not all.

"I don't think we can hold off (pickup) for two weeks. I'm not sure how that is a cost savings. We already have the manpower, the equipment and landfill," he said.

Also on the table will be Ald. Brian Pincott and Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart's call to change the city's zoning bylaws to try to accommodate a methadone clinic.

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