

Alderman calls for hiring of more transit officers

BY KIM GUTTORMSON, CALGARY HERALD MARCH 20, 2010

Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart is making a last-minute push to fund the remaining recommendations in the transit safety audit now rather than later.

She wants city staff to find ways to pay for another 12 transit peace officers as well as some capital improvements by the time council finalizes its 2010 budget and mill rate next month.

"We darn well have to implement all the recommendations, which council adopted," Colley-Urquhart said of the audit's recommendations. "I think we need to fulfil the obligations of this council."

Council ordered a transit safety audit in 2008 after the slaying of Arcelie Laoagan near a C-Train station. The incident focused attention on how safe passengers felt on buses and trains and highlighted the poor quality of cameras on platforms.

Recommendations from the audit included increasing the number of security officers, more and better surveillance cameras and improved lighting at LRT stations.

During last November's budget discussions, council voted to hire another 12 officers, half the number recommended.

In a notice of motion she will try to get on Monday's council agenda as a matter of urgent business, Colley-Urquhart wants city staff to bring a report to the April 12 meeting that outlines the cost of implementing the remaining recommendations and where money to do so might be found.

"We didn't invest in these things," Colley-Urquhart said of how transit got to the point of needing a security review. "We really need to be proactive."

Ald. Gord Lowe, who was also involved with the transit safety audit, said he wants the recommendations put in place but council made a decision in the fall.

"I was disappointed about a bunch of things council elected not to do," Lowe said. "But there was the clear understanding this was not off the table forever, but be back in the mix for our discussions next November."

The next round of budget talks is a more appropriate time to discuss funding the remaining recommendations than doing it during the mill rate approval, he added.

Council approved a 4.8 per cent property tax hike for 2010.

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