

# Mayor takes helm as new 'budget czar'

## Committee structure gets shakeup

BY JASON MARKUSOFF, CALGARY HERALD    OCTOBER 25, 2011



Mayor Naheed Nenshi is council's new "budget boss" - in title, at very least.

Under the biggest shakeup of council's committee structure in several years, a new priorities and finance committee with the mayor as chair and Ald. Gord Lowe as his vice-chairman.

City hall's annual organization meeting is a time for backroom jostling and positioning among alderman for appointments, and Monday's edition featured something close to a public squabble between Nenshi and Ald. Andre Chabot.

But don't mistake the result as a demotion for Lowe, who chaired the stand-alone finance committee for seven of the last nine years. His public role as council's resident numbers guy gave the false impression of his committee's influence over the shaping or reviewing the budget, as Nenshi argued Monday.

"That work largely was not happening in the finance committee," he told reporters.

"So folks who called the finance chair the budget guy or the budget czar; that actually wasn't correct."

The finance committee had one of the lightest agendas of any sub-panel. Much of the budget work actually happens privately in the mayor's office already, Nenshi noted.

So much of that work will shift to a monthly public meeting - with some public hearings - once it starts meeting in January, although aldermen wary of enhanced mayoral powers mandated a review of this new system after the next election.

Council also split the hulking land-use, planning and transportation committee into two: transit and transportation, and the tentatively named planning and urban development.

Chabot, chairman of land-use, planning and transportation, drew the mayor's ire by threatening to use a procedural tactic to delay the committee's breakup. "

"That's your prerogative. I'm just warning you that . . . you colleagues will have an interesting time at "org" day, given this is how you want to start," Nenshi said.

Chabot, who ultimately dropped his fight, later argued that he disagrees with dividing planning issues from transportation issues, and scoffed at colleagues who were concerned about how long the agendas and meetings for the Chabot-led panel.

"We signed up to be here for whatever it takes," he said.

Chabot takes on no chairmanships for 2012.

John Mar remains head of community and protective services; Ray Jones of the reshaped utilities and corporate services committee; Druh Farrell will head the planning policy committee, while Diane Colley-Urquhart will chair the transport body.

But the changes don't defang Chabot, an outspoken conservative. As colleagues pointed out to a disappointed Ald. Gian-Carlo Carra - denied a seat on the transport committee - council members can attend and vote at any policy committee they wish, including the new group Nenshi will chair.

That priorities committee will also handle functions of the Bronconnierera personnel and accountability committee, a low-profile body that made other appointments and was a sort of steering organization for the standing policy committees.

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