

Sarcasm the big winner in marathon budget session



Mary Trapani Hynes was one of more than 300 people who showed up to speak to the executive committee on Thursday.

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After three hours of unfriendly deputations, the eyes of those on the executive committee were starting to flutter with fatigue.

Small children had begged for their libraries to stay open. Arts community leaders made economic arguments for investing in culture. A blind woman pleaded not to close bus routes.

Fifteen down, 329 to go. Mayor Rob Ford had announced they would sit all night if needed.

Next up: Mary Trapani Hynes, a 67-year-old from North York.

“I’m a senior living in North York and I have some modest proposals,” she hollered into the microphone. Hundreds who had been quietly chattering shushed themselves silent.

“First, the library. You’ve made a good start with closing the Metro branch. Don’t stop there. You should get rid of the entire public library system —”

Spectators exchanged confused glances.

“— As you can see from the thousands of petitions and emails complaining about proposed service cuts, far too many people use the library to improve literacy and to learn about government and politics. You would save millions.”

The room exploded in giggles. Echoes of cheering could be heard from the neighbouring committee room, which was handling the overflow. Many on the mayor’s executive committee couldn’t help but chuckle.

“While you’re at it,” Hynes continued. “Get rid of the city’s website information on how Toronto city government works and on how to access the city. You would save millions.”

Privatize the TCHC, she continued. If people can’t afford to live here, move out! Streetcars and buses have to go too. Make room for the cars. Don’t drive? Can’t handle the increased pollution? Then leave!

“Those residents that remain in Toronto will be those able to look after their own needs and there will be less need for government services. More money saved. And — win, win — your government can give them a rebate on their property taxes from their savings.”

The applause went on for 10 full seconds. Several leapt to their feet. Opposition councillors bent over with laughter.

Councillor Adam Vaughan raised his hand with a question.

“That was very creative writing. Are you Margaret Atwood?” Vaughan asked, a dig at Doug Ford, who earlier in the week remarked he wouldn’t recognize the Canadian literary icon.

This one-minute speech had perfectly captured the mood at city hall Thursday. People were upbeat. They crowded by the hundreds around screens broadcasting the executive meeting, chatting with strangers about the things they love about Toronto.

Deputants from every background and socio-economic status, from a neurosurgeon mother to a man living in social housing, came for their chance to speak directly with the mayor.

Many at city hall just came to watch, as was the case with 64-year-old Jim Innes.

“(Hynes) hit the nail on the head as far as what a lot of people see happening in this city,” he said. Innes took half a day off work to come watch the deputations. He doesn’t even live in Toronto. He’s from Mississauga.

“But we’re all connected. Toronto is part of the economic engine that runs this area.”

The overwhelming majority of deputants spoke passionately against cutting services. Many said they were happy to pay taxes to keep libraries, Riverdale Farm and community grants programs, among many other services.

Outside the committee room after her rousing speech, Hynes said she was aware her deputation probably wasn’t going to change any of the councillors’ minds.

“Giorgio Mammoliti already said he’s only listening to us because he has to,” she said. “I’ve been watching, especially the mayor, and they’re not listening to us. But I wanted to have my say. And I did.”