



Public Services under threat: Local 500 Launches Campaign

City support workers in Winnipeg are the backbone of what makes this a great city to live in. However, there is a growing attack on public services and therefore our jobs and the services we provide.

Over the last three years, garbage collection was privatized, the City's Glacial Sand and Gravel Operations were sold and Assiniboine Park (a large part of the city's history and cultural life) has been handed over to a not-for-profit corporation.

In December 2006, the Mayor created an independent review body known as the Economic Opportunity Commission. The commission was set up to provide the City of Winnipeg with a menu of options for consideration towards the phasing out of the \$56 million dollar municipal business tax. In June 2007, the commission issued its report in which a number of specific services were targeted for elimination, downsizing, contracting out or privatization.

Economic Opportunity Commission (EOC) Recommendation Highlights:

The EOC proposes to eliminate \$56 million in costs from city administration and services, so that businesses can stop paying the business tax. The way the Commission proposes to cut costs, is through:

**** Reduce spending on public services ...***

The EOC wants volunteers – teenagers and seniors – to do the work of committed city workers. By cutting or reducing services such as golf courses, snow removal, animal services and a dozen others, the EOC says \$25 million will be saved, but offers no details.

**** Increase revenue from new sources ...***

To generate \$10 million for the city, the EOC says it can increase cost-recover fees for planning and inspection services or snow dumping. More city buildings and property can be sold, and they think corporations will pay more for sponsorships. Later, they also think a “small increase” in commercial property taxes can be allowed.

**** Depend on growth of tax revenue ...***

Over the last decade there has been a growth in the amount of taxes the City collects. The EOC says we can expect more tax revenue as businesses grow and more new homes are built to pay more property taxes. This growth they claim will generate another \$10 million a year.

**** Devolve services to the Province ...***

The EOC members think there is a further \$10 million in savings if some services are shifted to the Provincial Government. Without consulting the Province, the EOC wants to drop services such as assessment, health inspection, and ambulances into the provincial lap.

EOC Report is One Sided and Short Sighted

In *Improving our City's Competitiveness*, they claim "businesses are the driving force of Winnipeg's economy" (false, it is the people, as owners, workers and consumers) and the business tax "is one reason we aren't as competitive as we could be" (again false, as there is no evidence of this).

Basically the EOC thinks it's possible to reduce the business tax by cutting services, earning revenue from new sources, depending on increased tax revenue from projected tax growth, and getting the provincial government to take over services.

The EOC has dusted off the 1997 *Reshaping Civic Government* report of the Susan Thompson era and has said they want to "contract out any service that could be provided by outside suppliers." This means that street design, parks planning, library services, park police, janitorial functions, water operations, civic buildings management, arenas, meter reading, park mowing, and cemeteries are all potentially on the chopping block.

According to Jenny Gerbasi, Councillor for Fort Rouge-East Fort Garry, "This lopsided, biased, poorly thought out and ill-conceived report will be sent directly to the administration to be incorporated into budgets without appropriate public consultation." City officials are now reading the EOC report and integrating the EOC's recommendations into a draft budget for 2008/9 which will be approved this March.

In a Free Press editorial about the EOC report, Michael Dudley, a researcher with the Institute of Urban Studies in Calgary wrote that, "The 'public' in public services matters a great deal. All things public -- public transit, public parks, public libraries, public schools and public art galleries -- remain the lifeblood of a cohesive urban society. ... To the extent that these places become privatized or diminished, exclusive or excluded, there will be a corresponding decline in these opportunities, and thus the reinforcement of segregation, isolation and deprivation."

Everyone Loses

Unionized workers are mentioned in the EOC's report. Without serious explanation, the authors of the report say "High wage rates are one reason that makes it difficult for City facilities to break even." The solution the report puts forward is to cap all wage increases to stay under the rate of inflation, though some may be required to get even less. This will apply to all new collective agreements and the implication is this will be indefinite.



CUPE is specifically identified in the report and the EOC recommends getting rid of the employment security provisions currently in the Local 500 Collective Agreement. To ignore the needs of workers who are displaced because of privatization or closures, would make it easier to contract out and privatize city services and save the city money according to the EOC.

If the EOC's cuts and sales are implemented, everyone in Winnipeg loses. First to pay the price will be city workers who will lose jobs, or have wage increases capped at the rate of inflation. Next will be workers in private companies who will be forced to work for less. Then the citizens of Winnipeg will suffer the loss of the amenities, facilities and supports they depend on. Ultimately even small business people will lose as they will not have a vibrant city and urban economy to fuel their sales.

Local 500 Launches "Positively Public" Campaign to preserve and strengthen public services

Local 500 has launched a multi-faceted four year campaign (with public information, direct action, lobbying of politicians), to profile city workers and expose the services you provide. We want Winnipeggers to know that public services should be delivered by dedicated public employees who are acting in the best interests of the entire public. Part of our message to the public, is that strong public services create the quality of life we deserve in our city.

Ultimately, this campaign intends to stop the contracting out, shutting down and privatization of Winnipeg's public services. By building community support and suggesting improvements to how services are delivered to the public, the union will strive to keep services within the City's direct responsibility.

We are helping members to get more informed, involved and supportive of the campaign. We will propose ways of saving money for the city so public services can also be saved. The local will encourage members to take on community activities that raise the profile of the union and improve public relations, particularly with community leaders.

CUPE Campaign will Lobby Politicians

Winnipeggers must tell their Councillors that they want to keep their quality public services. Politicians must hear clearly, that Winnipeggers value their public services and they know how important city workers are to maintaining their services.

In the short term, City Councillors and officials must know that the public wants them to ignore the EOC report and its recommendations, as they prepare the 2008/9 budget. The EOC report has been forwarded to the Departments for consideration in their 2008/09 budget discussions.

Every CUPE Local 500 member should know what is going on and be prepared to help with this campaign. They can do the following;

- Be informed about what is happening and **prepared to tell** their families, friends and colleagues. Watch for regular information from the Local 500 office and go to www.cupe500.mb.ca for information on the campaign.
- Understand the dangers of contracting out and privatization, and **actively educate others** about what is at stake. There is a great deal of misunderstanding about what privatization is and how it undermines public services. It is up to us to show others how strong public services contribute to strong communities.
- **Participate in union and public events** that raise awareness, educate and consult Winnipeggers on their public services. There will be a number of meetings, rallies and other events during the campaign, and we need everyone to participate.
- In the workplace, **suggest *Ideas for Improvement***. As part of helping city officials reduce costs while improving services, we can suggest specific things they can do now. The union will coordinate this input. The union will help you propose ***Ideas for Improvement***.

We can make a difference in what the city plans to do about our public services and therefore our jobs. Our knowledge, experience and commitment is essential to maintaining public services and therefore the quality of life that Winnipeggers deserve. But we must stand up for city services and our jobs.

Winnipeg can continue to be a great place to live, but it will take visionary leadership and city workers who are committed to the 'public' in public services. We are Positively Public, and we are going to show it in the Winnipeg Way!

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For more information contact: Karen Byzuk, Special Assignments Officer, Local 500
Phone 942-1001, 702-275 Broadway, Winnipeg
or go to www.cupe500.mb.ca