

Speaking Notes
Presentation by Mike Davidson, Local 500
President
Re: Custodial Staff

Thank you for the opportunity to talk with you today.

As you know, I normally come to Council or to the different standing committees, representing over 5,000 members of CUPE who are employees of the City of Winnipeg. Today, I want to speak on behalf of our members who provide custodial services in City office buildings and aquatic facilities.

The ASD report regarding this matter was first viewed by CUPE on October 15th. The information indicates that an alternative operating model for Custodial Services (for office buildings and aquatic facilities), “may result in potential savings for the City in the order of approximately \$1,000,000 annually once fully implemented”. The plan also “assumes an aggressive timeline for reduction of positions through attrition and redeployment”.

Once again, there is no business plan or detailed costing of services to substantiate the projected savings. The projected figure appears to be a “best guess” with no supporting rationale or justification. We find this disappointing to say the least.

Modified Managed Competition

CUPE has a long and proud history of working with City administration and council on a number of initiatives to help improve services. However, simply put, the Union cannot bid on the work of its members. For one thing, it's illegal for us to be both the employer and the union. If our Local becomes a successful bidder, we effectively become the employer and that conflicts with our role as the bargaining agent for the employees.

The union and the members are always willing to improve service and are able to offer valuable knowledge and experience. For example, in 1995, Local 500 and management in the former Civic Buildings Department worked jointly together to improve the department's overall services to the line departments. This endeavor resulted in the achievement of enormous productivity improvements by the staff.

It is our contention that the contracting out of custodial services will not provide appreciable savings in the long run and the quality of the work will simply deteriorate.

Custodial Staff provide quality services and do more than janitorial work

Currently, the in-house custodial staff do a lot more for the City than what their job descriptions indicate. The city staff know their jobs and the workplaces they are responsible for. They take pride in their work and will put in the extra effort to assure their work is done well.

Problems with the ability of the contractor to meet service expectations often arise because of the contractor's more transient work force. High turnover rates are a consequence of the lower wages and minimal benefits that private companies offer their employees.

Problems with the level of service provided can also emerge because of the contractor's emphasis on the company's bottom line.

One important factor that must be recognized is the values of trained in-house staff that takes pride in their work and are concerned with doing a quality, service oriented job. Since they are already familiar with the buildings and the City's operations, civic employees feel responsible for pointing out problems or concerns which, in many instances could be easily addressed and improve overall operations.

By contracting out, the City loses its ability to ensure that dedicated and qualified staff are performing the job. It is the contractor, whose main concern is keeping employees and material costs down to earn a profit, who hires the employees to do the job.

Public Relations

The in-house building service workers, act as much more than janitorial and maintenance staff. They are in many cases, on the front line greeting and assisting the public. They are also available to assist other city staff in small requirements – moving, light maintenance, assisting the public. These duties are not listed as their typical duties but they perform them without hesitation and with a high level of professionalism. The concerns of contract employees tend to be defined by compliance with directives coming from their employers. They are not likely to have a sense of concern and commitment. Consequently, they view their work in terms of making a living.

Management has greater workplace control with in-house Services

When city staff perform the work, the employer has some flexibility and control associated with work assignments and

schedule adjustments in order to deal with unanticipated critical needs.

Whereas, if unexpected problems occur within a contract for service, it can be dragged out while the City and the contractor negotiate over who is responsible. In some cases the process completely shuts down. If the City controls the service, employees can remedy the problem quickly and effectively, without working through a reluctant third party.

One specific human resource function that in-house, building services provides is in redeploying accommodated personnel. Local 500 has long maintained that injured workers and disabled employees' are a valuable resource to the City. Many of these employees are capable, willing and able to perform meaningful work which is productive to the City. Over the years, there have been a number of successful placements of injured and disabled employees into the building service worker positions.

The proposed contracting out of the custodial services will have a direct impact on the City's ability to provide rehabilitative employment opportunities for injured or disabled workers.

Conclusion:

Your employees are your greatest assets. The employees working in the Building Services Division have served the City well over the years. Not only have they done a good job for the city, but in many instances, they contributed a great deal of their working lives to the organization.

We firmly believe that contracting out does not benefit the city in the long run and can in fact cost taxpayers more.