

**CANADIAN UNION OF PUBLIC EMPLOYEES
LOCAL 500**

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

**Central Council
October 24, 2011**

CUPE / *Canadian Union
of Public Employees*
Local 500

TO: All Central Council Delegates

RE: PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Greetings:

The following is my monthly report of the activities and issues facing the Local since our last Central Council meeting:

1. NDP PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT ELECTED

On October 4, the NDP won a fourth and historically important mandate to govern Manitoba over the next four years. Elected were thirty-seven seats for the NDP, nine for the PC, one for the Liberals and 0 for the Green Party.

CUPE members and staff played a large voluntary role in the election and saw their efforts pay off in a number of important constituencies.

In particular, Local 500 member Dave Gaudreau was elected as a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) for St. Norbert. Dave, along with many members and their families worked very hard in this election and we're very proud of their dedicated efforts.

2. CITY COUNCIL APPROVES \$50.00 ANNUAL FEE FOR GARBAGE AND RECYCLING PLAN

City Council voted in favour of a new garbage and recycling plan that will add a \$50.00 annual fee to your water bill. The City will replace garbage cans, auto bins and blue boxes with automated garbage and recycling carts by October, 2012.

A majority of councillors supported the plan by a vote 11 to 4. Voting against the plan were Jeff Browaty, Mike Pagtakhan, Ross Eadie and Harvey Smith.

Many municipalities across our country are bringing garbage collection back "in-house" due to cost savings. The Local is providing and advocating on behalf of our members and our citizens to bring back at the very least, a portion of the residential solid waste pick up.

On October 20, 2011 the following information was printed in a Winnipeg newspaper article:

More fees...

During the 2010 mayoral race, a Sam Katz campaign phone call warned voters they could lose their homes if Judy Wasylycia-Leis was elected and hiked property taxes by two per cent. In the first year, such a hike would have cost the average Winnipeg household an additional \$43.00. Here are some of the hikes and fees council has approved since then:

Frontage levies: *The average Winnipeg property owner with an average-sized, 50-foot lot will pay an additional \$60.00 this year after the city raised levies by \$1.20 a frontage foot.*

Recreation: *Winnipeggers pay more for arena ice time and swim passes after the city tacked on an additional \$900,000 in recreation fees this year. Learn-to-swim and Learn-to-skate programs saw a 10 per cent increase and other program fees went up by 20 per cent.*

Dog licences: *The cost of replacing a dog-licence tag went up \$3 this year. Licence costs for dogs went up \$1 to \$27 for sterilized animals and to \$62 for unsterilized animals. Other animal-service fees rose by 1.8 per cent.*

Green fees: *Winnipeg Golf Services increased green fees by \$1 this year.*

3. CITY TO CONSIDER OFFERS FOR PURCHASE OF GOLF COURSES

The City of Winnipeg has put out an Expression of Interest for the sale of seven of its golf courses for commercial or residential development or take-over of their long-term lease.

This past May, City Council tabled two motions in response to the recommendations contained in the Operational Review of Winnipeg Golf Services Audit Report. The first motion would see the City enter into a competitive bid process for the operation of the City-run golf courses, while the second motion was to stop operating golf courses altogether and sell off some of the property for commercial or residential development.

We advised the City that before any final decisions are made, a full business plan should be provided to the citizens before rushing to conclude that contracting out and privatization will automatically correct the problems.

4. **CITY ISSUING EXPRESSION OF INTEREST FOR CITY ICE RINKS**

The City of Winnipeg has put forward an Expression of Interest for the private sector to “develop” the City’s community arenas. At this time, City officials have stated there is no business plan but they want to hear what the private sector will offer.

Again, the Local advised the City that before any final decisions are made, a full business plan should be provided to the citizens before this matter moves forward. We all question why build new infrastructure when we clearly cannot maintain our current infrastructure. There are many other questions that need to be addressed including whether recreation programs will be cut if ice costs will increase again.

5. **CITY’S INFRASTRUCTURE**

Early this month Transcona Councillor, Russ Wyatt said Winnipeg may have to eventually close bridges and roads that are unsafe to drive on if nothing is done to address the City’s infrastructure problem. He said that last year the City had to close a local street that was unsafe and use money from next year’s budget to fix the problem.

All levels of government including the current federal government must be active partners to address this problem. The City has had 14 years of property tax freezes, a roll back plus a business tax reduction for businesses in the downtown area.

Please find attached to my report a letter sent in to the media on September 29, 2011 relative to infrastructure funding, renewal and responsibility by all levels of government.

The newspapers did not print the letter.

6. **REFUSED TO RELEASE GOVERNMENT CONTRACT**

The City of Winnipeg is being chastised by an annual audit of government openness and transparency for refusing to release any details of a City contract for street sweeping.

The results of the National Freedom of Information Audit made public last September 27, shows out of 50 access requests for a single contract made to municipalities and federal government departments and agencies, Winnipeg was the only one to cite confidentiality in a decision to fully deny the release of a government contract.

Winnipeg took 18 days to review the request and then denied access in full.

Please find attached to this report the full story.

7. RETIREMENTS

Barry MacBride, the Director of the City's Water and Waste Department retired at the end of the month. He served as Director for the last 14 years.

Also retiring is Jim Brennan, the City's Fire Paramedic Chief. Mr. Brennan was appointed as the head of the City's emergency services in 2007.

8. HEALTH CARE SUPPORT WORKERS WEEK

I took part along with others to celebrate in this year's Health Care Support Workers Week held this October. Our members at Riverview Health Centre and Winnipeg Regional Health Authority provide a very valuable service. Support Workers Week is about recognizing the importance of the service that our members provide day in and day out. Health Care workers improve the quality of life for many people in our society.

9. GOOD OF THE UNION

The Local held its Honorary Life Dinner this year at the Winnipeg Convention Centre on October 14, 2011. This year's inductees were:

**Joan McMahon – Community Services Unit
Pierrette Boily – St. Boniface Museum**

The dinner event pays tribute to members who have gone above and beyond for the good of the Local.

Conclusion:

Please share this current issues document with your co-workers.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Davidson". The first letter "M" is large and stylized, followed by "i", "k", "e", "D", "a", "v", "i", "d", "s", "o", "n".

Mike Davidson

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September 29, 2011

To the Editors:

RE: SEPTEMBER 28, 2011 "WHO RUNS THE CITY TODAY" – WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

Your recent editorial ("Who runs the city today", September 28) speaks to the issue of our crumbling infrastructure, both in our city and our province. You note that the problem is so severe that business groups have recommended raising the sales tax and the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce wants the province to give the City authority to implement a civic sales tax specifically for infrastructure.

When the Infrastructure Funding Council (IFC) asked for input into a municipal infrastructure funding strategy for Manitoba, CUPE Local 500 provided a submission citing the need for access to a more equitable sharing of tax revenues between the different levels of government. Without an equitable, sustainable source of revenue, our ability to make any significant progress towards bridging the infrastructure gap will continue to have serious implications on the quality of life in our communities.

While all three levels of government must work together to devote more resources to our communities, the Federal Government must be an active and continuing partner in our infrastructure renewal. Both federal and provincial legislation and programs must also be strengthened to encourage and support local government use of bond, debenture and local investment options. In short, the Federal Government needs to step up to the plate and ensure we have a national infrastructure strategy that will allow municipal and provincial governments to sustain our important, essential infrastructure now and into the future.

Mike Davidson
President
CUPE Local 500

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Information audit criticizes city

"I think we pride ourselves on being open and transparent.

The only way we wouldn't release something is if it was proprietary'

— Phil Sheegl, Winnipeg chief administrative officer

Refused to release government contract

By Mia Rabson

O TTAWA — The City of Winnipeg is being chastised by an annual audit of government openness and transparency for refusing to release any details of a city contract for street sweeping.

The results of the National Freedom of Information Audit, made public today, shows out of 50 access requests for a single contract made to municipalities and federal government departments and agencies, Winnipeg was the only one to cite confidentiality in a decision to fully deny the release of a government contract.

One other city released a council report on a contract rather than the contract itself, and St. John, N.B., denied all requests because it was not yet subject to access to information laws. (The provincial legislation hadn't yet been proclaimed.) Saskatoon released its requested contract in full in just one day, saying contracts are public documents and are routinely made available, the audit reports. The City of Brandon, which is governed by the same access legislation as Winnipeg, also released a city contract in full within 30 days.

Winnipeg took 18 days to review the request and then denied access in full.

"Please be advised that the City of Winnipeg does not disclose the details of contracts for reasons of confidentiality," was the written response.

Winnipeg chief administrative officer Phil Sheegl said the city policy on contracts is to protect any proprietary information.

"I think we pride ourselves on being open and transparent," Sheegl said. "The only way we wouldn't release something is if it was proprietary."

The policy is also not to black out any proprietary information and release non-proprietary information but simply to not release anything, he said. He acknowledged that would mean most city contracts would not be released publicly.

Winnipeg did release in full the other two requests made of it, including its social media use policy for employees and its public affairs department budgets and staffing for the last three years. There were other cities and federal departments that denied similar requests in part or in full.

This is the sixth annual audit conducted by Newspapers Canada, the voice of the newspaper industry in Canada. Students hired to do the audit submitted 354 requests to 11 federal departments and agencies, four or five departments in each province, 39 municipalities and 10 major hospitals.

Newspapers Canada chief executive officer John Hinds said the idea is to create a culture of openness. Too often, Hinds said, governments view access legislation as a way to put up barriers to keep the public from getting information.

"That shouldn't be the purpose," Hinds said. "The point isn't to create barriers but to actually release information. The philosophy should be 'You have a right to this information so here it is.'" The audit makes similar if not identical requests of each level of government to compare how quickly governments respond and how fully they release the information. Most access laws require governments to respond within 30 days.

In Manitoba, out of 17 requests made, just nine were released in the allotted time frame, which gave the province a D grade for its speed.

Manitoba was one of two provinces to receive an A for the level of disclosure, with 13 requests released in full and three in part.

The audit notes the public's right to know how and where governments are spending money is a fundamental part of democracy and keeping governments accountable. It recommends governments ensure third parties know the contracts can and will be released to the public when the contracts are negotiated.

The audit found how laws are applied vary even within governments. For example, seven federal departments and agencies released their full policies on the use of social media by employees, while Environment Canada withheld 38 pages.

On another request, for government contracts, Environment Canada was one of only two federal departments to release a contract in full. Most withheld some information to protect confidential information of a third party.

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