



CUPE Local 500 Speaking Notes

Standing Policy Committee on Protection, Community
Services and Parks (Special Meeting)

March 13, 2020

Thank you for the opportunity to present on the 2020 preliminary budget.

As you know, I am here representing the largest group of workers at the City of Winnipeg including the Community Services and Parks.

CUPE is presenting at all Committee hearings this week, and next to deliver the same message: We are opposed to all cuts to services and staffing throughout the entire budget.

First and foremost I want to convey CUPE's concerns with the budget process as a whole.

Our members and members of the community have expressed their frustration with the way in which this budget process was presented.

Winnipeggers were presented a doomsday budget that created fear over the future of the services and programs they depend on. Your municipal workforce feels the same way.

While some of the cuts were rejected, we are still deeply concerned with the number of cuts that remain in the overall budget - from reduced hours in our libraries, to cuts to 311 to closing of Waverley fleet operations - these are all going to impact the important services our members provide to Winnipeggers.

The budget under this committee's jurisdiction targets children, youth seniors and families. It targets low income people. It targets newcomers and refugees. It targets workers.

Our libraries and staff promote education, learning, literacy, community, health and imagination among the public.

But the proposed budget threatens to undermine generations of work in the community – building trust, building relationships, and building a community of learners and teachers.

On some of the specifics:

Changing evening hours by closing at 8:00 pm would mean cutting 1,898 hours of access to our libraries.

This would be devastating to the countless college and university students who use our space to study.

It would have a devastating impact on adult learners who use our libraries after their working hours to study to advance their education or learn new skills through evening literacy programs and events.

Many of these students and learners use the internet in libraries, and rely on the support of librarians to help them navigate tools that help them succeed.

This would also disproportionately impact low-income Winnipeggers who also use our evening Library services.

Shutting down Sunday services will have a similar effect where we'll see 888 hours of less time to access our libraries.

This will create barriers to Winnipeggers who rely on library services over the weekend who may not be able to drop in at any other time.

The reality is Winnipeggers work different shifts, whether night shift in a hospital or two jobs during the day: and everyone should have the right to access library services.

Not to mention the impact to our part-time library workers who are the backbone to keeping our programs and services running in the evenings and on weekends.

These workers are also the most precarious in terms of fluctuating hours of work and less predictability in their schedules, with many holding down several jobs just to make ends meet.

Yet, in the face of this challenge, they still provide exceptional and dedicated customer service.

With the proposed closures of Sundays and reduced weeknight hours, workers will be exposed to having their hours cut by a range of 24% - 30%.

It is both an unfair and unreasonable to impose this burden on your employees, our members who have made a commitment to our libraries and to our communities.

I also want to touch on the 50% cut to leisure guide programming in this budget.

The city's leisure guide programs are incredibly important for a healthy and vibrant community.

They are a critical dimension of the quality of life for all Winnipeggers – they provide access to affordable and quality recreation and leisure programs that many in our community depend on including, children, youth, seniors, families, newcomers and people with disabilities.

These cuts are short-sighted and our community deserves better.

Lastly, and this relates to our Urban Forestry Division. CUPE has been a vocal critic of the cuts made to our Urban Forestry Branch over the past few decades. We have always said that we should be taking better care of our tree canopies and the health of our trees.

We know that tree pruning is an important piece of keeping the trees free of disease, and preventing tree-related property damage.

Snow events like what happened last October could happen again, and will cost the city millions if we don't recognize the need to invest in the department in the years to come.

Finally, CUPE 500 has offered many suggestions over the years on big ticket items and smaller on-the-ground solutions to make our city more accountable, more transparent, and offer better quality public services.

At the same time our union has always been open to having difficult conversations with department heads and Councillors alike.

We have worked collaboratively, and when we haven't we have disagreed respectfully.

I'll conclude my remarks by reiterating CUPE's position: We are opposed to any cuts to our public services and programs. We are opposed to cuts to an already under resourced workforce.

Thank you.

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