



CUPE Local 500 Speaking Notes

Standing Policy Committee on Water and Waste, Riverbank Management and the Environment

March 17, 2020

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

As you know, CUPE represents the largest group of workers at the City of Winnipeg, including the Water & Waste Department. Our members value the work they do and the services they provide contribute greatly to the quality of life in Winnipeg.

CUPE will be speaking at committee meetings this week to deliver the same message: we are opposed to all cuts to services and staffing.

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, a number remain in the budget: reductions to library hours, cuts to jobs at 311, French Translation services, cemeteries, closure of Waverley Fleet repair facility, and more.

The proposed budget includes the reduction of 24 hour emergency coverage from 2 crews to 1.

We know our city has ageing water infrastructure, which is especially impacted during our long winter months.

We recall in years past the massive number of homes, properties, and businesses that experienced frozen pipes and major delays in having those pipes addressed.

At the time we acknowledged that our teams are already operating as skeleton crews, hardly able to keep up with the number of water-related emergencies across the City.

By cutting the 24 hour emergency coverage in half, you will put our city at greater risk through delayed response times to water main breaks and sewer back-ups. This will lead to increased property damage to homes and businesses.

By reducing the Engineer in Training program could result in a gap of trained engineers, a gap we cannot afford. While I appreciate that the program would be scaled to meet *anticipated* demands, it leaves the potential of being unable to replace trained engineers in a timely manner if there is a sudden shortage or further reduction in staff.

We need to ensure that we have the ability to draw on a strong pool of trained engineering staff, rather than a shallow one.

I also want to touch on the discontinuation of grants to important community organizations like Save our Seine and Fort Whyte Alive Slow the Flow. The proposed budget rightly indicates that the discontinuation of these grants would limit our City's access to important research, and community work these organizations provide.

While they are not run by the City directly, providing grants to community initiatives that protect our waterways and support responsible stewardship are critical to a thriving, healthy, and safe City for everyone.

To sum up, the reduction to a number of FTE's in the Water & Waste Department will significantly impact our community in many ways.

To make matters worse, our municipal workforce continues to suffer under decades of Vacancy Management.

Our City can reach a million residents, but without a robust workforce we will have a public service that is unable to meet the needs of our community.

CUPE Local 500 has put in a great deal of time, energy, and resources challenging previous councils on some of the decisions they made: from contracting out garbage and snow clearing, to protecting our public golf services.

Contracting out results in tax dollars being sent into private profits instead of quality services, at the expense of city staff who live here, spend here, and count on job security and benefits for their families.

We have also been outspoken against mismanagement and cost-overruns in major projects that have cost taxpayers millions that could have been spent on improving civic services.

We are proud of our track record in working with city administration and council over the years. CUPE 500 has offered many suggestions 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.

CUPE is proud of the work our members do day in and day out, providing vital services to the citizens of Winnipeg

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.