

## **Speaking Notes**

### **Standing Committee on Protection and Community Services**

**March 9, 2012**

#### **CUPE Local 500's position on the 2012 Operating Budget, City of Winnipeg**

CUPE Local 500 welcomes the opportunity to appear before the Standing Committee on Protection and Community Services today to present our views on the proposed 2012 operating budget.

We realize that City Council is facing some very difficult decisions this year. In working through these decisions, you will determine the course the city takes today and into the future.

We believe that the city is our greatest investment. Many people often forget that. The services that we provide determine the quality and the order of life in Winnipeg. So there are good reasons to protect the investments we have made in our city. We want to keep it safe, comfortable and affordable. Citizens will otherwise lose vital services they depend on. Winnipeg will become a less attractive community for new and existing businesses.

Local 500 members are dedicated employees of the City of Winnipeg and are proud of the services we provide. We maintain and repair water and sewer lines, we respond to public inquiries about City services, process bill payments and licenses, maintain our parks and city streets, provide recreational programs and maintain facilities.

We remain committed to providing high quality services and we value and take pride in our work. So, when we comment on the 2012 Operating Budget, it's from the point of view of the citizens/taxpayers who we are in contact with on a daily basis. It is also important to emphasize that our members and their families are also taxpayers and use our City services.

**There are merits in this budget:**

We view the proposed property tax increase as a positive decision, due to the fact that our city hasn't had an increase in well over a decade. At the very least, property taxes should keep up with inflation due to the rising cost of fuel, materials, etc. While we respect Council's desire to reduce the City's reliance on property taxes, we can't think of any other major city in Canada that hasn't had a property tax increase for 14 years. This simply won't work due to the needed funding for the city's physical and social infrastructure.

**Business Tax:**

We think it's important to comment on the business tax reduction as outlined in the 2012 Operating Budget Public Consultation document presented on January 30, 2102 (see attached), which indicates that business tax rates have been reduced by 34% (9.75% to 6.39% over time). We believe businesses and commercial properties need to contribute more to the financial well being of the city. They benefit tremendously from the

services provided by the City and should pay their fair share.

### **Vacancy Management:**

There is \$13m in Vacancy Management in this budget. This practice has taken its toll on almost every single department within the City of Winnipeg. It is inconceivable to think that the workforce can continue to absorb these levels of cutbacks, while still maintaining service levels to the public. We believe that Vacancy Management is a non-transparent erosion of the City's front line-services and ultimately, will impair the City's ability to deliver needed programs.

### **City of Winnipeg Recreation Programming in General:**

- Recreational programs in general are strained and underfunded. Throughout the years, more programs have been eliminated and/or reduced. Some examples are:
  - Swimming programs have been impacted and as a result many parents were unable to register their children for lessons and programs over the years.
  - Reduced number of community programs offered to adults.

- Although, the City has made improvements to its registration process, the department has not increased the number of “spots” available to patrons. Many programs are filled within minutes of registration being opened. The City has cut hours at one of its community locations and thus, has forced many children to go to various private centres outside of their own neighbourhood.

### **Libraries in Winnipeg:**

Listed in the “Review of Winnipeg Public Library Services October 2011”, page 26, states the following:

#### Program Planning

The board goals and objectives of the Library Services Division guide the development of library programs for adults, youth and children. The following goals have been established to guide the development and scheduling of programs:

- Promote the use of reading and or literacy.
- Stimulate the use of the library and its resources.
- Attract new library users.
- Provide opportunities for social interaction and community building.
- Establish or enhance partnerships with external organizations.

## Library Expenditures

In 2009, total library expenditures were \$25,989,910 compared to other major Canadian cities. Winnipeg had the lowest total library expenditures per capita at \$38 per capita.

## Library Material Expenditures in Canada

Compared to other Canadian cities, in 2009 the Library Services Division had one of the lowest total library materials expenses, which includes funds from Provincial grants, trust funds and book sales. The division spent \$2,870,535 on library material compared to other Canadian cities such as Ottawa with a materials expense of \$4,705,108 and Edmonton with a materials expense of \$5,569,227.

Winnipeg spent very little on this budget line as opposed to other Canadian cities. In our view, we need to reinvest in our library materials line, in order to maintain updated materials and equipment.

### **User Fees:**

Over the past number of years, we've witnessed an increase in user fees. Some examples would be higher green fees at our golf courses, arena ice bookings, recreation programming and swimming lessons. These fee increases have excluded many adults, seniors and children from taking part

in various programs and recreational activities in our community. One might argue it makes little sense to lower the business tax, while expecting the citizens to shoulder the burden of higher user fees.

We would urge City Council to lower user fees so that more families and low income earners can take advantage of the recreational opportunities and programs that the City has to offer.

**Conclusion:**

To varying degrees we are seeing the City's Level 2 departments come under some type of budget constraint. All of these reductions in staffing levels equal less service to the citizens of Winnipeg. In our view, we feel that citizens have come to expect that their streets and sidewalks will be maintained and in good condition. That pools and arenas will be maintained and that City parks will be litter free and the grass cut and trimmed.

Many of these core services are under resourced and in need of increased investment.

We also have concerns about succession planning within the civic service. A very high percentage of the civic work force is eligible to retire in the very near future. We submit the City must plan now to deal with this high level of "workforce knowledge" that is being depleted from the civic service.

We feel it is important to state there are many positive initiatives where Local 500 and the City have and are working together, such as:

- Joint Education and Training Initiatives;
- Jointly trusted pension plan;
- Willingness to improve workplace health and safety;
- A/B side scheduling in the Water and Waste Department;
- Scheduling shifts in our arenas.

We appreciate the City's willingness to work with us on initiatives such as these. The bottom line, however, is that Level 2 departments, where the majority of CUPE members work, are suffering greatly from the restraint measures imposed over the years. The effect of these restraints include:

- A decreased capacity to deliver services to the public;
- Poor morale within the civic workforce;
- Reduced ability to redeploy injured and disabled workers;
- A huge increase in workplace complaints and grievances.

Every City department needs a certain amount of inflation level adjustment for this year's operating budget. Given the infrastructure deficit, they all need more. We strongly urge City Council to review the budget from the point of view of maintaining our infrastructure and stabilizing our ability to deliver needed public services.

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Attachments