



**CANADIAN UNION OF PUBLIC EMPLOYEES
LOCAL 500**

SPEAKING NOTES SUBMITTED TO:

**STANDING POLICY COMMITTEE ON INFRASTRUCTURE
RENEWAL AND PUBLIC WORKS**

**RE: STATUS OF THE WINNIPEG PARK POLICE
AT CITY PARKS**

February 10, 2009

Speaking Notes

Presentation by Mike Davidson, Local 500 President

Standing Policy Committee Infrastructure and Public Works Committee

Tuesday, February 10, 2009 9:00 a.m.

Thank you for the opportunity to talk with you today.

As you know, I normally come to Council or to the different committees of Council, representing the 5,000 members of CUPE who are employees of the City of Winnipeg. Today, I want to speak on behalf of fourteen of our members who provide policing services in Winnipeg's large parks, and therefore provide security services for every resident of Winnipeg.

You have before you, a proposal to eliminate the Park Police Service and replace the Park Police Officers with an alternate service model. This proposal will reduce the current compliment of 14 police officers by roughly half and will reduce their role from providing full policing support to a more limited patrol function.

We are concerned that this reduction in staffing and therefore service will seriously affect the security and accessibility to these parks, which are a major recreational and social asset of our city. We are concerned that cutting back on highly trained and experienced personnel will affect what the citizens of Winnipeg get from the Parks and will also affect tourist potential.

The Park Police provide on-site policing that assures the safety and security of our citizens in city parks. Their primary role is to enforce regulatory statutes, laws and by-laws. Their presence in the major city parks has a deterrent effect upon anti-social behavior and activities that would otherwise

endanger and inconvenience the public. The Winnipeg public has come to rely on them so they can enjoy all that the parks, including the Assiniboine Zoo, have to offer.

The proposal before you also calls for the provision of 24 new Park Ambassadors. These Ambassadors are expected to provide the kinds of services that the Downtown Biz Guides provide. And while we appreciate the City is creating opportunities for young people in these kinds of positions, they are not going to provide the same services and quality of service that the Park Police provide.

The Ambassador positions could be a positive addition to the City's parks. They can provide a new service in parks that will be appreciated by the public, but their role will be distinct and separate from the services the Park Police Service provide. The Ambassadors will not be tasked with policing functions or responsibilities, nor will they be trained, prepared or equipped to provide the range of services the Park Police have been providing.

A key point to make is that if you take away the Park Police's authority to arrest, if you take away their police function, you undermine the ability of the City to provide the full range of essential services needed. As many studies of Community Policing have shown, the immediate and appropriate response of authorities is the best way of preventing major crime and deterring potential criminals.

What I think has not been emphasized, are the many additional services the Police provide that are not strictly police functions, but which enhance the overall services they provide the City. Let me list a few examples of what they

have done, to show what will be lost if the City proceeds with its plan to terminate their positions.

- A family was lost in Kildonan Park and drove the wrong way on the road. The Police Officers stopped them before they did any damage and helped them get out of the park and find the address they were looking for - they were not charged, they were helped.
- An adolescent female was found passed out on the grass one night, after obviously consuming a great deal of alcohol. When her friends abandoned her she was taken to HSC first and then home to her parents.
- Frequently a senior citizen will report his or her car has been stolen. However, after the Park Police take the person to a few of the parking lots in the Park, they will find the car.
- Late at night or early in the morning, single women will jog or walk in the park alone, indicating they feel it is safe for them to do so.
- There have been a number of suicide attempts that Park Police have dealt with. In each case the suicide was prevented and the individuals were given the help they needed.
- On one occasion it was discovered that a driver of an erratically driven car was experiencing a diabetic shock. An ambulance was called but as none were available, the Park Police took her to the Health Sciences Centre where she got immediate attention.

- There have been a number of incidents of bikers, skaters or joggers being injured in the parks. They have been assisted by the Park Police who either called for medical support or took the injured person to hospital or home.
- During the flood of 1997, Park Police provided additional support and controls in the parks along the Red River that allowed security personnel and volunteers to deal with the threats to the City.

We understand that the City wants to reduce costs as much as possible. However, in this case, the \$100,000 a year that would be cut would seriously reduce the quality of service Winnipeggers and tourists need while in City parks.

The professionalism and commitment of the Park Police to serve Winnipeggers is important in maintaining safe and friendly park resources. Their authority and therefore the deterrent effect of their work keep the costs of criminal behaviour limited. And the personal attention they provide while on duty enhances the reputation of the City as being friendly and family oriented.

We strongly encourage you to recommend that the Park Police service be retained.

Thank you for your attention.

Speaking notes submitted by:

CUPE Local 500

February 10, 2009

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