



Speaking Notes to
Standing Committee on
Infrastructure Renewal and
Public Works

**Re: 2013 Operating Budget – City of
Winnipeg**

January 11, 2013

Speaking Notes

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CUPE Local 500's position on the 2013 Operating Budget, City of Winnipeg

CUPE Local 500 welcomes the opportunity to appear before the Standing Committee on Infrastructure Renewal and Public Works today to present our views on the proposed 2013 operating budget.

As you all know, I represent City workers who are the frontline delivery agents of the city services funded from this budget. So when we comment on the 2013 Operating Budget, it's from the point of view of loyal employees, taxpayers and citizens of Winnipeg.

Firstly, we believe the City has yet again, let down the public in how it has developed this budget. The budget was not developed with direct public input and understanding. Others making presentations to you and subsequently to City Council, will talk about the limited time for public consultation, discussion and debate. We think these are valid concerns and hope you will recognize they reflect the desire to be part of this important civic exercise and that we all have something valuable to contribute to the budget planning process.

There are merits in this budget:

- We believe that dedicating 1% of the proposed property tax increase for street renewal is a step in the right direction to help improving the poor state of our roads and sidewalks.
- The increased funding for the Dutch Elm Disease management program and tree pruning program will help add to the beautification of our city. Having said that, we believe that city forces should be the provider of these services.

However, we do have concerns we think are important to express:

- **Vacancy Management.** There is \$13.6 m in vacancy management in this budget. This continuing practice has taken its toll on almost every single department within the City of Winnipeg. By cutting staff and leaving positions vacant, it undermines the ability of the City to deliver quality services. 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.

- **Accelerating the Alternate Service Delivery (ASD) review and implementation process.** The budget contains an allocation of \$350,000 for this process. It further notes an anticipated savings of \$2 million each year. The Union is unclear as to what exactly the “accelerated alternate service delivery process” is, and where these savings will materialize. In our view, the ASD process is flawed and history has shown it doesn’t work.
- **Councillors’ Representation Allowance:** In our view, an increase of \$600,000 is significant and should be deferred until a further study/needs analysis can be performed. We believe this money could be better spent on infrastructure or other public service needs.
- **Business Tax:** We think it’s important to comment on the impact of maintaining the business tax as status quo. We believe businesses and commercial properties need to contribute more to the financial well being of the city. If businesses use the city’s infrastructure to make a profit, then they also need to be a partner and pay their fair share.
- **Grant reductions:** Reducing the grant amounts to seniors programs, museums and other non-profit agencies, will greatly

impact the elderly and families in our community. At the very least, these programs should receive status quo funding.

- **Reduction to Advertising:** The City routinely reminds us that they want to operate as a business yet advertising funds have been cut from all departments. We believe the City needs to continue to promote its services and the staff who provide them.

To a varying degree, 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, every City department needs a certain amount of inflation level adjustment for this year's operating budget. The citizens of Winnipeg have come to expect that their streets and sidewalks will be maintained and in good condition, and 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.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, I think it's important to tie our comments on the operating budget to what has been happening in our city and to our public services over the past number of years. To contribute to the budget discussions, we strongly suggest the following:

First, the City needs to reverse the thinking that the private sector is better able to provide quality public services than the public sector. The experience all across Canada is that private delivery of public services or privatization of public infrastructure is not working. Public sector workers with the guidance of progressive political leaders have been proven again and again as the best people to deliver public services.

Second, we know that a genuinely public budget process will help lead a more effective allocation of resources and public support. Therefore, it is important that the City engage its residents, employees and business people in the budget process.

Lastly, we believe that there needs to be a gradual increase in the business tax. We have major needs to pay for, and now is the time to consider this option to help generate more revenue. As we indicated

above, businesses benefit tremendously from the services provided by the City and should pay their fair share.

City services are what make a community a good place to live in. As public sector workers, we are prepared to put in the extra effort needed to meet the needs of Winnipeggers. But to do so, we need a budget that provides the financial resources to do so.

Thank you.

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