



CUPE Local 500 Speaking Notes

Standing Committee on Infrastructure Renewal and
Public Works

RE: 2016 OPERATING BUDGET – CITY OF WINNIPEG

March 14, 2016

Thank you for the opportunity for CUPE to present our views on the 2016 Operating Budget.

As you know Local 500 represents employees in the Public Works Department who deliver frontline services in streets maintenance, insect control, parks, forestry, and other service areas. We value the work we do and want to provide the highest quality of services possible.

Merits in this Budget

First, we feel it's important to state there are some positive merits to the budget:

- We applaud the \$6 million allocation towards the building of the all Shoal Lake 40's Freedom Road;
- An increase to the city's Reforestation Improvements program will help in the fight to preserve the elms in Winnipeg;
- Continued funding for the Aboriginal Youth Strategy will help support important programs and initiatives related to employment, literacy and education;
- The \$150,000 allocation for the Community Homeless Assistance Team, (CHAT) is positive, and will help address the needs of those experiencing homelessness.

Areas of Concern regarding Public Works infrastructure

The citizens of Winnipeg want value for their tax dollars. They want a level of services that will provide a good quality of life in this city. They want their streets and sidewalks maintained, they want to go to parks that are clean and safe, and they want their trees pruned.

The budget boasts to spend \$105 million on street renewal in 2016. As in the past number of budgets, this amount falls short of the \$140 million the city needs just to maintain its existing road inventory. There's also very little help in other areas of our Public Works infrastructure where maintenance has been underfunded and under resourced for many years.

Some examples include:

Tree Pruning and tree planting:

The city contracts out a majority of its tree planting, removal and pruning. The contracting out of tree maintenance remains a concern and this service should be brought back-in house to help improve services, reduce costs and increase accountability. The city has not shared information on contracting out of this work with the public, and much like snow clearing services, the so-called "savings" have never been illustrated.

Grass Mowing:

Grass mowing in big ditches, and in areas before the perimeter highway and service roads around the city, has been virtually eliminated. Parks and

boulevards have also seen grass cutting and trimming cycles lengthened due to budget restraint.

Tree and shrub bed Maintenance in parks and on boulevards:

This service has been almost eliminated due to staff shortages and budget restraint. Trees are now pruned on a lengthened cycle and shrub beds get very little maintenance anymore.

Curb Renewals:

Curb renewals seemed to have emerged as a low priority and are only replaced when designated as “dangerous”. Winter snow plowing damage to curbs often goes unreported as the majority of this service is contracted out. These unreported damages are estimated to be in the millions of dollars.

Back Lanes:

The city has neglected back lanes for years and maintenance is not done on a regular basis. This is due primarily to budgetary restraint.

Traffic Line Marking

The city used to perform two to three complete cycles of traffic line markings annually. This has been reduced to one cycle and at times, crews have been unable to complete one marking of the entire city due to budget cuts.

Overhead Sign Lights/Sign Replacement:

We are seeing overhead signs with burnt out bulbs and a reduction to maintenance on a regular basis. There is also no longer any sign renewal

service. Now signs are only replaced when they fall down or are unrecognizable

These are but a few examples of core services that are under resourced and in need of increased investment.

Innovation and Efficiencies

Vacancy Management

This budget is calling for \$20.9 million in vacancy management, which is an increase of 18% or \$3.2 million over 2015's allocation. Our members consistently report that the continued practice of not filling vacant positions is putting further stress on their ability to provide the quality services Winnipeggers rely on. They are doing more with less and often working the jobs of two or three people. The city's workforce simply cannot continue to absorb these levels of cutbacks, while still maintaining service levels to the public. Local 500 is calling for an immediate end to vacancy management to ensure adequate staffing levels in city services.

Innovation Savings

The budget calls for \$11.1 million in "savings" including \$2.7 million in innovation savings but does not provide any details of what or where those savings will be achieved. This is but one way of hiding the fact that there will be more reductions, but officials have not decided yet where these cuts will be.

Local 500 has been open to meeting with city officials to discuss initiatives such as the quality of snow clearing services and bringing this work back in-house to improve services and save money. In a climate where citizens are demanding a more open and accountable government, there is an opportunity here to ensure our services are publicly owned, operated and delivered.

Business Tax Reduction

Once again, the city will be raising less revenue from businesses, with a cut in the business tax from 5.6 to 5.3 % in 2016. Local 500 does not believe that the city should be reducing the business tax at a time when taxes for the average citizen are rising across the board. They benefit from the services provided by the city and should pay their fair share.

Conclusion

We have a strong and experienced public workforce dedicated to providing quality public services. We simply cannot support a budget that does not adequately fund services, maintain our infrastructure and reduces staffing levels. Ultimately, it is Winnipeggers who will pay the price.

Thank you.

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