



Speaking Notes Submitted to Executive Policy Committee

March 16, 2016

RE: 2016 City of Winnipeg Operating Budget



CUPE Local 500 is pleased to have this opportunity to present our views on the proposed 2016 operating budget.

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, maintain our parks and city streets, work in libraries and provide recreational programs and maintain facilities. We value the work we do and want to provide the highest quality of services possible.

Each year at budget time, crucial decisions are being made about our city's financing, its services and its employees. Over the past number of years, many services have been reduced or eliminated. As CUPE members, citizens and taxpayers in Winnipeg, we speak to you today in our role as both providers and users of city services. As we've said many times in the past, we want to work with the city in formulating a budget that maintains our infrastructure and stabilizes our ability to deliver needed public services.

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.

We also appreciate the city's willingness to have worked with us on many positive initiatives such as the Joint Education and Training Fund, Jointly Trusteed Pension Plan, improvements to workplace health and safety, scheduling of shifts in the Water and Waste Department and implementation of the 311 Call Centre.

Areas of Concern in this Budget

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, 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 (tree pruning, grass mowing, curb renewal, traffic line marking, etc.) has been underfunded and under resourced for many years. By not adequately resourcing the upkeep of our roads, civic buildings and parks, we are only passing these costs on to future generations of taxpayers.

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. Businesses and commercial properties need to contribute more to the financial wellbeing of the city. They benefit from the services provided by the city and should pay their fair share.

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 October 2015, Local 500 released a report that would achieve significant cost savings, streamline the city’s fleet management and ultimately build a strong, effective and trustworthy public snow removal service for the citizens of Winnipeg. In a climate where citizens are demanding a more open and accountable government, there is an opportunity here to ensure our snow clearing services are delivered with municipal equipment and by well-trained operators, who value the services they provide. We look forward to continuing our discussions with the city about improvements and cost savings to this important core service.

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. The citizens of Winnipeg deserve a budget that meets their needs now and into the future.

Thank you.

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