CUPE Canadian Union of Public Employees
Local 500

Speaking Notes Submitted to Executive Policy Committee

February 18, 2015

RE: Snow Clearing Review

Thank you for the opportunity for Local 500 to speak on the important issue of snow clearing.

My remarks today will focus on the need for this city to review its snow clearing practices, including a review of the continued use of contracted snow clearing services.

Winnipeggers deserve timely and effective snow clearing services, regardless of weather conditions. In fact, top-quality service is needed *most* when weather conditions are as harsh as we witnessed last year. Even the Firefighters Union, last year, expressed their deep concern that failed snow clearing in some situations, can result in serious safety issues for Winnipeggers in terms of reduced response time to emergencies. Additionally, MPI reported drastic increases in collisions and accidents, due to poor road conditions last year.

I'm sure many of you read the in-depth Winnipeg Free Press story by Dan Lett from January 25th, 2014 titled "Epic Fail or Perfect Storm", which gave a somewhat fair analysis of how the weather events of December and early January of last year unfolded.

However, there are certain aspects of his article that merit further discussion.

Lett's article references the fact that one of the challenges facing our snow clearing services, is that there is simply not enough data to make any sort of analyses related to cost or quality comparators between the private contractors, and the public operators. This is something we should all be concerned with.

CUPE Local 500 is in receipt of a Freedom of Information request that we submitted in the fall of 2013. The response to this request is troubling.

We requested:

> **Copies of any reports or analysis comparing in-house snow removal versus contracted-out snow removal. The time frame for this request is from January 1, 1998 to present.**

We received the following response:

> **The Public Works Department does not maintain performance/productivity measures on private versus in-house snow clearing contracts, primarily due to the way in which operations are designed. The City has 9 snow clearing contracts that are all-inclusive in their bidding and paid out on an event basis over an entire area. By contrast, the internal services are paid on an hourly basis with no start and end measurement for the event.**

It continues:

> **The differing approaches to service delivery prevent the type of comparative analysis or reporting requested.**

So the fact is, this city, despite snow clearing services being a core service, has not even attempted to review or compare contracted versus in-house snow clearing. They say it is not possible.

Other cities across Canada have in-house snow removal, and other cities have contracted out snow removal. But this city hasn't reviewed - internally or externally, these two service delivery models in nearly 17 years.

On December 17, 2013 Local 500 provided a brief to City Council on the Operating Budget. At this presentation, we noted that the Operational Review of Public Works released in June, 2013 highlighted the fact that snow removal, which is 80% contracted out, is one area of public works where costs exceeds those of peer cities.

The report further recommended that the city review the costs of contracted versus in-house snow and ice services.

Even the city's finance chair at that time, said he was exploring if a switch to more public service snow removal could save money.

"We compete for private contracts no different than everyone else who requires snow removal. From what I understand, those costs have gone up." (*Winnipeg Sun, September 9, 2013)*

Local 500 continues to maintain that true cost savings can be found by reigning in these snow clearing contracts, and bringing this service back in-house.

Our FIPPA, in addition to the recommendations of the Public Works Review, proves that not only does this city fail to act on its own reports, but has failed to act responsibly to review, analyze, and present alternatives to the contracted services that makes up 80% of our snow clearing.

We strongly urge this committee, as well as Council to take seriously our position that snow clearing in Winnipeg should be phased back in-house.

Thank you. I would be happy to take any questions.

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