

**CANADIAN UNION OF PUBLIC EMPLOYEES
LOCAL 500**

BRIEF SUBMITTED TO:

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION



May 18th, 2007

1. A NEW DEAL FOR CITIES?

We believe that the City of Winnipeg has been under-funded for years. A recent Probe research study confirmed that most Winnipegger's feel our Civic government lacks the financial resources to perform services well, the way that citizens expect. Many needed expenditures related to infrastructure, staffing and modernizing equipment have not been made available. Today, we see a depleted public service, struggling to keep up with the many needs of the citizens of Winnipeg. The standards for Public Service delivery over the past two decades are much lower today, and this has aided the rise of some of the social ills we see in our City presently.

We believe the City of Winnipeg needs access to growth revenues such as a percentage of both the Federal and Provincial sales tax. We also believe in fairness within the present City tax system. Under the former Filmon government, we saw a decision made to change to a flat business tax within the City tax system. This change hugely benefited the large corporate community, at the expense of the small business community. To this day, we still do not understand why the CFIB would support such a change that would hugely impact their membership in a negative way!

A new deal for cities should be about public infrastructure and the resources needed to strengthen our communities.

2. USER FEES FOR CIVIC SERVICES?

One of the recent decisions made by City Council concerned charging a dumping fee in the City of Winnipeg snow dumps. The business community argued successfully that the present business tax, charged to them by the City, compensated the City for this service. Council agreed and rejected the implementation of such a user fee.

However, if the business community receives additional civic services beyond what an ordinary resident receives from the City, a user fee should be charged back to the business property owner. To this end, if the business tax is to be eliminated we recommend the City charge business user fees.

In fact, there is already a civic example where the police service will charge an extra fee or eliminate service in regards to alarm systems for personal property.

3. RATIONALIZING NEEDS AND SERVICES?

This is an interesting question! Today, we see many decisions being made based on the suburban experience. More police officers, though welcome by many suburban residents, will not effectively change crime statistics. As we have stated earlier, we have seen the lowering of public service standards over the last two decades which interestingly enough corresponds with the deterioration of inner city neighbourhoods.

The Canadian Parks and Recreation Association has in their library numerous studies on the impact of reduction to public services and the concurrent rise of criminal gang activity from cities in the United States.

Where there has been civic public investment in neighbourhood renewal, we also see the lessening of social issues. The City of Winnipeg's own statistics are bearing this out where neighbourhoods such as Spence and West Broadway have seen significant improvement using selected indicators as proposed by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

4. SERVICE DELIVERY EFFICIENCIES?

We have seen service delivery improvements where there has been an investment in the public service. We are again talking about enough trained, skilled workers with up-to-date equipment and systems and the infrastructure to perform well. However, real investment in the public service has been a scarce occurrence.

Even today, the City of Winnipeg is having a needless debate on the proposed 311 services which should be publicly operated! For a multitude of reasons, City's across North America have already made the decision to operate 311 publicly but we seem to be uninterested in learning from their experiences.

5. MINIMUM RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY TAX?

On the surface, this seems to be a fair proposal. However, it is wrought with problems of equity.

Housing stock in our city is not of equal value, so why should civic taxes be of equal value? If we went to this tax system, we believe in a short time period the City of Winnipeg would either have to subsidize taxation in certain neighbourhoods, because residents could not afford the increased taxing level or the City of Winnipeg would have to further reduce operating budgets.

Further, we believe a minimum residential property tax will work against the revitalizing effort being done by neighbourhood groups in their area of the city.

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cc: Central Council
CUPE National Staff Representatives

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