

Thank you for the opportunity to present on the 2020 preliminary budget.

As you know, I am here representing the largest group of front-line workers at the City of Winnipeg.

CUPE is presenting at all Committee hearings this week, and next to deliver the same message: We are opposed to all cuts to services and staffing throughout the entire budget.

First and foremost I want to convey CUPE's concerns with the budget process as a whole.

Our members and members of the community have expressed their frustration with the way in which this budget process was presented.

Winnipeggers were presented a doomsday budget that created fear over the future of the services and programs they depend on. Your municipal workforce feels the same way.

While some of the cuts were rejected, we are deeply frustrated with the number of cuts to programs and services that remain in the overall budget.

Although I do have to say I'm relieved that I don't have to speak to the proposal of reduced street lighting – I'm sure everyone would agree the suggestion was complete hogwash in the first place.

We know that Public Works is a unique department. The department is responsible for the flow of our people. Whether its traffic management, snow clearing, transit or active transportation this department is critical to help Winnipeggers get from point A to point B safely.

Our City is constantly changing. We have a growing population, and an expanding footprint.

We have more cars and buses on the road. We have more cyclists and bike lanes, and we have the responsibility to ensure our networks are accessible to those with mobility challenges.

In recent years our City has been building bridges, fixing roads, developing cycling networks and improving accessibility. The

Transportation Master Plan coupled with Our Winnipeg have set us on a course that would continue improving the way we interact with our roads, sidewalks, parks, transit ways, and sidewalks.

We know that because of our harsh winters, the Public Works department in Winnipeg has unique challenges.

Our streets are more likely to develop potholes, making it dangerous for drivers, for commercial transportation, for public transit, and for cyclists and pedestrians.

Our winters bring unpredictable snow events that need to be cleared, not just on priority streets but on local streets, and especially on sidewalks.

CUPE has always taken the position that snow clearing should be brought back in-house, where City employees can deliver the services that citizens require, and the service would be transparent and accountable to the public.

We've heard from hundreds of Winnipeggers over the past few years that they are often frustrated with the quality of snow clearing, and in

particular with the process to register complaints about property damage caused by private contractors.

While public satisfaction with snow clearing hovers at about 70% over the past five years, we know we can be doing even better.

Snow clearing is a core city service that should be operated by City employees with city equipment.

The reality of operating in a city the size of Winnipeg is that our infrastructure needs constant maintenance.

Whether it's a bridge or a road, a sidewalk or a back lane – we need to ensure that our infrastructure continues to be serviced.

If we don't continue maintaining our infrastructure it will only cost more in the long run when disaster strikes.

We also can't simply accept maintenance as the solution to our city's larger challenges. Those challenges include building a more vibrant, active, accessible, and sustainable city into the future.

The Climate Crisis is real, and investments in public transit are critical to helping reduce our carbon emissions.

We know that the time to take action on the climate is now, and our city needs to be a leader in supporting public transit, and the operators and support staff who keep our buses running.

CUPE also believes in free, accessible transit for all. Public Transit is a necessity for people to get to work, school, or to our recreation facilities.

We stand in support of our colleagues at the Amalgamated Transit Union, and will be working with them – as Winnipeg’s municipal employees, to ensure our transit system works for everyone.

Finally, CUPE 500 has offered many suggestions over the years on big ticket items and smaller on-the-ground solutions to make our city more accountable, more transparent, and offer better quality public services.

At the same time our union has always been open to having difficult conversations with department heads and Councillors alike.

We have worked collaboratively, and when we haven't we have disagreed respectfully.

We do look forward to meeting with the Public Works department in the future to continue our conversations on in-house snow clearing, and ensuring we have enough staff to continue to maintain our roads and infrastructure.

Thank you.