

Summary of CUPE Local 500 Public Plowing Works Report

June 23, 2015

In February of 2015, CUPE Local 500 launched a public feedback campaign to solicit the concerns of Winnipeggers with respect to the quality of Winnipeg's snow plowing service. To this end, CUPE 500 developed a telephone hotline as well as a website where Winnipeggers could register their stories and ideas on improving snow plowing in our city.

CUPE 500's Snow Plowing Hotline resulted in hundreds of comments and concerns from across the city.

The full report will be issued at a later date, but below are some preliminary results:

- CUPE 500 heard from nearly 400 Winnipeggers from across the entire city, with participants calling in and submitting comments to the online feedback form from every ward.
- Results indicate a high level of dissatisfaction across the entire city, with concerns being raised in every area of the city. The specific types of concerns themselves appear to be at least somewhat neighbourhood-specific.
- Over two-thirds of participants raised concerns or criticisms of snow plowing operations in the city, while the remainder indicated some degree of satisfaction or offered no opinion either way.
- The quality of plowing appears to be a recurring problem across the city. Concerns about the plow depth and width were mentioned often.
- Many participants felt that poor plowing has resulted in dangerous driving conditions, due to ruts and unnecessarily slippery roads, among other issues.
- Property damage caused by contracted plow operators was raised as a major issue by many participants, both to city property (curbs, etc.) and to personal property (fences, lawns, etc.).
- Many participants felt privatized plowing had negatively affected the City's accountability and reputation.
- Many participants believe that publicly operated snow plowing would be more transparent to citizens.

The fact that so many Winnipeggers have offered their concerns and ideas on snow plowing indicates strong public interest in this core city service.

"With nearly 400 Winnipeggers participating, members of City Council should not take for granted the fact that citizens want an improved service," says Mike Davidson, President of CUPE Local 500. "Our public employees are ready and willing to do this work with efficiency, high quality, and with the care that Winnipeggers deserve."

CUPE Local 500 represents approximately 5,000 City of Winnipeg municipal employees.

Comments from the Snow Plow Hotline and Website

The following are a few selections from the many *real* comments Winnipeggers offered as part of the Public Plowing Works project:

Plowing Quality

"I had to get out of my house and show the guy how to angle the blade to do a proper plow. Watched him and then he started doing a better job. His boss came and told him he can't do it like that, it wears the blade out. He went back to the old way, and you could fit almost a newspaper underneath the blade. Totally unacceptable."

– Transcona resident (*275)

"Contractors were clearly trying to save their graders' blades. I get that they aren't cheap but that's what they are for. Skimming the surfaces and leaving ruts and undefined lanes is unsafe and extremely dangerous. The last City Council didn't seem to care that this was happening and I'm glad this one is."

– St. James-Brooklands-Weston resident (59)

Windrows

"One year I was so ill, trying to get out to go to the doctor I passed out trying to shovel the windrow which was 2½ by 3 feet. Thank God a neighbour came along and found me."

– Winnipeg resident (76)

"The snow plows left huge blocks of ice all across the bottom foot of my driveway and drove over it. I tried to remove as much as I could but it is packed down from the driving over it and I now have to try and drive off the one side of my driveway so my car doesn't scrape. I was in tears because I knew I would not be able to remove it. I'm a single mom and have a shoulder injury. What a sloppy job!"

– St. Vital resident (156)

* (#) indicates the order in which respondents provided feedback.

Property Damage

“Our neighbourhood elm trees and 100-year-old cast-iron fences have been terribly damaged by plow work, especially [during] the winter of 2013-2014.”

– River Heights-Fort Garry resident (*14)

“A contractor for snow clearing hit our parked car... [the plow operator] admitted to being under a contract, but refused to give his name. A supervisor also under contract stopped by but also refused to leave any contact information. They continued to push that MPI and the City deal with accidents easily... MPI has filed suit against the contracting company who is refusing to cover the damages... If a city worker had struck our car, there would be a record of who was working and this process would be simplified, and we wouldn't have to pay a contractor to hit our car.”

– Fort Rouge-East Fort Garry resident (117)

Private Contractors

“Recently I witnessed [near my work] one of [a private contractor's] loaders idling in the parking lot for 2 days. Not only did the employee scheduled to use this loader get out of his loader and leave in a cab not to return, but when my employer called the company to inform them, they had no clue it was sitting there all day. To top it off they left it sitting there running, wasting our tax dollars, for a total of about 48 hours. Why should we pay contractors all this money for them to just burn it away in situations like this?”

– Winnipeg resident (118)

“My husband worked for many private contractors who had/has snow clearing contracts with the City of Winnipeg... [he once replied] to an ad on Kijiji that was posted during a heavy snow fall in 2011.... The owner was desperate enough to hire an operator, so desperate that he hired my husband over the computer without checking his qualifications or even asking him to produce a drivers' license... it was a surprise as to how old this loader was and safety was questionable. I would like to see the City take over snow clearing and have operators trained and operate safely.”

– Winnipeg resident (196)

* (#) indicates the order in which responders provided feedback.