



**Speaking notes for Alex Grimaldi
President - CUPE 30
Presentation to City Council
September 27th 2005**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

I want to start out by saying right from the outset that CUPE is not here today because we believe the transfer of Drainage to EPCOR would hurt our union or any of our members.

We have excellent collective agreements, contracts that we are proud of, that will protect our members in case of a transfer. We know that the work our members do is valuable enough that they will earn a good wage for it no matter what logo is on the paycheque.

And it's not as if CUPE will lose even a single member if this proposal is approved. We have members here at the City and at EPCOR - and we fully expect to have members with both organizations - no matter what decision you make today.

We ask you to reject this proposal not because it is against our self-interest but because it is not in the public interest.

I'm here today, because the members of my union, the ones who run the drainage system, know all too well the perils of this proposal. And they have demanded that CUPE take a stand in favour of the public interest.

The fact this has been raised three times since 1995 has caused some angst to our members. They know moving drainage would compromise the service they are proud of – and they don't get why administrators won't accept no for an answer.

The Price Waterhouse Coopers report is at best, lukewarm to the idea of the transfer. And I would argue that when you look at some of the information it omits, the case against the transfer becomes weaker still.

For example, two weeks ago in this chamber, EPCOR CEO Don Lowry tried to tell you that a key advantage to the transfer was the 'cash in hand' council would receive. Mr. Lowry smoothly promised an extra \$9 million per year to a council known to be looking for revenue.

But it's a false promise. It's based on the fact that EPCOR will borrow the money and pay a higher dividend with the loan. It's like taking out a mortgage to spend more at the movies. It doesn't work in the end.

Ask yourselves why you would want to give up control of 45% of your asset base. You already know that it is much easier to make council inquiries into drainage than it is to make inquiries into power or water.

Is this what you want? If you have complaints from voters – to tell them you are powerless to do anything?

Sure they can call EPCOR – but this is a monopoly service. What choice to voters have if they can't get any satisfaction?

This is not good governance to the taxpayers of Edmonton, and it's not in the public interest.

Imagine if the river floods, something that happens from time to time. Hopefully EPCOR will handle the emergency well. But what if they don't? What will you be able to do about it?

I would suggest very little.

I would suggest you will end up beating your head against a wall trying to get answers from a corporation that doesn't have to answer to you directly.

And god-forbid if EPCOR cuts back on emergency preparedness because it's not profitable. Because if they do, you won't be able to stop those cuts from happening – if you even know cuts are happening.

But if they do cut back on emergency preparedness – rest assured that sooner or later Edmonton will pay for it.

And citizens will be mad.

And they won't take their anger out on EPCOR.

EPCOR's role is to make a profit – the city's role is to provide municipal services.

Services like drainage.

Services operated for the public good, not for profit.

Think of the control you have over development. Planner Andy McCready says that if you control where drainage pipes go – you control the scale, scope and shape of future development.

I suspect most of you ran for council because you have strong views on where development should go. Why would you now give up that control to an arms length board?

Development should be in hands of elected representatives – not an unelected board. That is what citizens expect.

Development is a core function of civic government. It is practically why municipalities exist.

Please don't deny citizens democratic control over even part of the development process.

Mr Lowry argues that this proposal is in the public interest. But no one represented the public interest when this issue was being studied.

In fact it was practically done in secret.

I'm afraid to say that is how EPCOR conducts itself. You make decisions in open council meetings – transfer the asset to EPCOR and drainage will never be open to public discussion again.

The Sierra Club has come out against this proposal. The Federation of Community Leagues is against it, the Urban Development Institute is against it. The employees of drainage are against it, the Parkland Institute produced a study against it.

Even Price Waterhouse Coopers, in their comprehensive study of the issue, could find no compelling reason to move drainage.

There is near unanimity on this issue.

At the last council meeting where this was discussed, Councillor Sloan asked to speak to the head of drainage.

Shockingly – that request was denied – as if staff call the shots instead of councillors.

The administration is not of one voice on this issue. The head of drainage isn't here because he opposes the move and isn't afraid to say so.

He's been muzzled.

And Mr. Mauer doesn't have the decency to admit that to you.

But apparently staff are now calling the shots instead of elected representatives.

Get used to it councillors – because if you vote yes to this proposal you won't ever know what is happening in drainage again.

And that is not in the public interest.

But there is one big, compelling reason not to do it.

Accountability.

This is a public asset. Built up over years by the taxpayers.

We have a right to look under the hood from time to time, and make sure it's being managed well.

That means our representatives have the right to phone into drainage and ask questions.

That means citizens have the right to take concerns to their elected representatives instead of a corporate call centre.

And we have a right to bring issues forward to council.

If you vote yes to this proposal, it is the last time you will ever really know what's going on in drainage.

And that is not in the public interest.