

Contracts, programs worth millions in limbo

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John Spears
Paul Moloney
CITY HALL BUREAU

John Aquino's company has a contract worth nearly \$90 million, and up to 150 jobs, riding on the outcome of the city workers' strike.

Aquino is vice-president of Bondfield Construction, which last month was confirmed as the low bidder for an overhaul of the Milliken water pumping station and reservoir that serve both Toronto and York Region.



Getting garbage out of Chinatown As the city strike continues, the Toronto Chinatown Business Improvement Area is providing weekly garbage removal for members. Video by Randy Risling. (July 15, 2009)

But the strike forced city council to cancel its July 6 meeting, when the works committee recommendations would have been approved. So the company has never formally been awarded the two-year job. "When you schedule your resources on such a big job, and it doesn't start, it's a problem," Aquino said.

Planned resources sit idle and the uncertainty makes it impossible to bid on other jobs.

Councillor Peter Milczyn (Ward 5, Etobicoke-Lakeshore) is circulating a petition among councillors to call a meeting of council to deal with urgent items such as contract approvals. A majority of councillors – 23 signatures – is required to force a meeting, and Milczyn said yesterday he's close to the quota.

Bondfield also has a \$55 million contract for a women's housing development on Edward St. that faces delays because of the job action. The company needs a plumbing permit, and subsequent inspections, to proceed with the next stage.

"We're going to be grinding to a stop soon," he said, adding about 45 people work on the project.

Big jobs aren't the only ones on hold due to the strike.

The works committee also recommended giving city staff permission to negotiate with Public Bicycle System, which runs the Bixi public bike-sharing program in Montreal, in hopes of starting a similar program in Toronto.

The plan was to draft an agreement for council's consideration by this fall so the company could start up in Toronto in the spring. But without the formal go-ahead from council, that too is on hold.

Other items that have passed city committees and are awaiting final sign-off from council include:

A \$9 million program to provide grants of up to \$1,000 to help people upgrade their home insulation

Selecting a company to manage new retail space in Union Station

Increasing a loan to the Sony Centre, to \$7 million from \$5 million, to tide the theatre over until its scheduled reopening next year

Cancelling rental fees for Caribana's use of Olympic Island and Lamport Stadium, as well as rental, fencing and cleanup charges at Budapest Park and Marilyn Bell Park

Caribana would normally be charged about \$80,000 for using city facilities but council has routinely waived the fees to help the festival, in addition to providing a grant, which this year is \$475,000.

While councillors are seeking a special council session, it would do little good because there are no staff to carry out council's wishes, said Councillor Joe Mihevc.

"You can approve all the stop signs you want, but there's no one there to actually create the stop sign and there's no crew to go out and actually install that sign."

With files from Vanessa Lu