

Don't vote down deal with unions

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It is understandable that some Toronto councillors are upset with the deal ending the 38-day strike by city workers. The city did not achieve the sort of restraint on costs that it needs to cope with its financial challenges in the coming years.

But it would be the height of irresponsibility for these councillors – members of the "responsible government" group at city hall – to vote down the deal at today's special meeting of council.

First of all, rejection of the deal would undoubtedly mean a continuation of the strike. The city's residents and businesses have already put up with enough. Not just the lack of garbage collection, although that is bad enough, but also the litter on the streets (a turnoff for visitors at the height of tourist season), the cessation of ferry service to the island, the cancellation of daycare and summer programs for kids, the delays in building permits, and so on.

"I don't think the public wanted the strike over at any cost," says Councillor Case Ootes of the responsible government group.

But what are the likely consequences flowing from a rejection of the deal? It would almost certainly *not* lead to a resumption of bargaining – at least not meaningful bargaining. Both sides would be too firmly entrenched. The union locals would, understandably, not want to budge off this week's deal. And the city could hardly agree to the old deal once council had rejected it.

Rather, rejection would inevitably lead to a back-to-work bill in the Ontario Legislature. That would send the dispute to an arbitrator, who would be most unlikely to force any more concessions on the unions than were agreed to in this week's deal. In fact, there is a real danger the arbitrator could award the workers a better deal than they achieved at the bargaining table.

The only real option, then, is to approve the deal in today's vote. Those councillors who find the deal distasteful can make their views known in speeches preceding the vote. They can even abstain to show their displeasure. But voting down the deal would be taking their protest a step too far.