

Post-strike cleanup begins

City council approves agreements with unions in 21-17 vote

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Work is under way to get all of the city's temporary dumpsites cleaned up by Sunday night after Toronto city council voted tonight to ratify new contracts for both its inside and outside workers, signalling an official end to the city's 40-day strike.

Around 6:40 p.m., council voted 21 to 17 to approve the tentative agreements reached over the weekend with CUPE locals 416 and 79.

Within the hour, garbage workers rolled up to temporary dumpsites across the city, ready to start carting away the trash.

At least four sites were scheduled to start cleanup by 8:30 p.m. - one on Villiers St., near Cherry St. in the port lands; one in Sunnyside Park, near Ellis Ave. and the lake; another at nearby Sir Casmir Gzowski Park; and one at the Scarborough Arena park at Birchmount and Kingston Rds.

The city intends to have all 26 temporary sites cleaned up by Sunday night. If city workers alone can't meet the deadline, the city is ready to call in private companies to help them.

Other workers were already back on the job today, after both striking unions voted to ratify the deals earlier in the week.

Maintenance and parks department employees were back to work emptying garbage bins, picking up refuse from the streets and collecting litter from city parks.

"We're pretty much at full capacity," said city spokesperson Kevin Sack, who said the city was using as many workers as it could muster to get the cleanup done.

"Every piece of equipment we've got, we're using."

He said the city would have workers on the job through the night getting the city clean.

Inside services including libraries and the city's permits department were up and running today, as were golf courses. Some other services, such as daycares, indoor pools and the licensing office, aren't scheduled to open until next week.

Regular garbage pickup will resume Tuesday.

Earlier today, in a scathing rebuke, Mayor David Miller insinuated that some members of council had not been



SARAH DEA/TORONTO STAR

'Bay Street Bob', a 22-year city solid waste worker, returns to work early this morning in Dundas Square.

totally honest with their constituents when it came to disclosing details of the agreement .

"I think the people of Toronto haven't been told by some members of council the facts," Miller told council in a response to criticisms from councillor Mike Del Grande (Ward 39, Scarborough-Agincourt) during the council meeting that began this morning.

Del Grande challenged the mayor's assertion that the deal is fair for taxpayers by quoting emails sent by constituents calling the agreement with CUPE "appalling," "cavalier," "disgraceful," "irresponsible," and "beneath contempt."

"Why if this is such a great deal? ... The majority of Torontonians are extremely unhappy with this deal and they're unhappy with you?" Del Grande said.

The Mayor responded by vigorously defending the deal, calling it a "precedent" when it comes to keeping wage increases low and getting rid of sick day banks across the province.

He said the strike could have gone on all summer if he hadn't gone public with the city's offer mid-strike.

"It was at that moment that the negotiations changed and there was movement. Did we have to negotiate and trade on some things? Absolutely," said Miller, before daring councillors to vote against the agreement at the expense of Torontonians.

"Members of this council, you'll have a vote today, and it will be your choice if you want to continue the strike for another month or until whenever the province legislates us back to work," he said.

Miller also defended the part of the agreement that allows current unionized employees to continue banking their sick days, while new hires will not be included in the program, and called any criticism of it "absurd."

"Members of council should be going to the people of Toronto and saying, 'We took responsibility for a negotiated settlement.' It's an excellent settlement," he said.

"The wage increases are lower than everybody else around Toronto negotiated last year. It respects our fiscal position. We ended a benefit that's been there for 50 years. We're making massive savings over the next few years because of what we've done. That's what people should be saying and they need to hear it from their councillors."

Sparks flew from the outset of the debate this morning, as two councillors who declared conflicts of interest marched out of the chamber hurling personal attacks at Miller.

Peter Milczyn and David Shiner, who both have relatives who are CUPE members, asked if the agreements with the two union locals could be voted on separately. When two-thirds of council failed to agree to their request as required by council rules, they walked out.

"It's a low point in this council when this kind of courtesy is not extended," said Milczyn, whose wife is a member of Local 79.

"The only way it appears Mayor Miller can win votes is by forcing members of council who don't agree with him out of the chamber," said Shiner, whose son is a seasonal employee of the city and a member of Local 416.

Milczyn said councillors were not provided with details of the tentative agreement reached with CUPE until late last night.

As the meeting continued, Miller thanked city residents for their patience during the strike, and placed blame for the work stoppage squarely on the unions.

"This council did not ask for this strike," Miller told council. "Our unions chose to go on strike."

Miller said when councillors were briefed on the negotiations on July 8, more than two weeks into the strike, there was a "gasp" in the room at the union position.

Despite that, he said the city negotiated affordable contracts, achieving "massive savings" compared with what it would have paid by following the pattern set with most other recent public sector contract settlements.

The contract is "fair, reasonable, responsible and affordable," Miller said.

Councillor Denzil Minnan-Wong (Ward 34, Don Valley East) said council should be able to examine the back-to-work protocol negotiated with the unions, in which the city agrees not to take action against some employees who allegedly misbehaved on picket lines.

Speaker Sandra Bussin said the protocol wasn't before council, but her ruling was challenged and overruled.

Minnan-Wong said that if the mayor, as head of the city's labour relations committee "has come up with an agreement where he's sanctioning criminal activity, that ought to be before council."

In a presentation to councillors, city staff said the agreement negotiated with the unions will increase the city's wage and benefit costs by a total of just under six per cent over the next three years.

That's well below the rate set by most other public sector settlements, they said. In those settlements, they said, wage increases alone have averaged about three per cent a year, exclusive of benefits.

City manager Joe Pennachetti said the agreement reached will cost the city about \$42 million less over the next three years than the city would have paid if wages had risen by three per cent annually, and if the city had not succeeded in negotiating a phase-out of the current sick bank.

The city's agreement contains no benefit enhancements, Pennachetti said.

Mark Ferguson, who heads the outside workers' union local, said following the morning's proceedings that it was a fair deal and it would be "disappointing" if councillors rejected it.

"In case it's not (ratified), we'll be re-establishing picket lines immediately following the council meeting today," he said.

Ferguson said that the contract gives his members a wage increase that's less than that of most other public sector unions over the last few years.

"We believe we have met the city more than half way in this set of negotiations, and under the circumstances there's an obligation on city council to ratify this collective agreement," Ferguson said.

With files from Kenyon Wallace, John Spears, Donovan Vincent and Jason Miller