

## Mayor gets stalled permits on track

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[Stephen Dupuis](#)

I was pleasantly surprised with the action taken by Toronto Mayor David Miller earlier this week to mitigate the impact of the civic workers' strike on homebuilders and professional renovation contractors in the city.

Believe it or not, there is more to this strike than garbage. Since June 22, the city has not been accepting new building permit applications, not processing applications in the system and not conducting building inspections. Builders and renovators proceeding under permits issued prior to the strike have had to either hit the pause button at an inspection milestone or pay for an independent review which will be double-checked by city workers after the strike.

While many builders and contractors have been keeping busy building out projects permitted prior to the strike, many others have been stalled and the longer the strike drags on, the more projects, large and small, residential and non-residential, will get caught up.

Given the economic times, this situation is an absolute travesty. It's particularly galling to have construction workers sitting idle at the same time the senior levels of government have pledged billions in stimulus dollars for infrastructure projects, affordable housing and home renovations, all in an effort to create jobs.

On that note, the mayor's announcement that up to 500 building permit applications made prior to the strike and sitting in the queue since then will be processed is welcome news.

As soon as builders and renovators get their hands on those all-important documents, they'll be hiring skilled workers, buying materials and putting shovels in the ground, which is exactly what the mayor wants to see.

If the mayor wants to see even more economic activity unleashed, his next step should be to devote resources to processing new building permit applications. The demand is there as evidenced by comments from various BILD members in response to this week's announcement.

One member wrote "this is certainly good news for those that have already applied for permits. For those of us who need to apply for permits, we are in serious trouble. I have about five weeks of work for my employees without getting any permits, and two permits to apply for. If the strike is not resolved ... there is a good chance I will be laying off employees at the end of August."

Another member wrote "perhaps the mayor will also have work for everyone that has been waiting to submit permits since June 22 and refund fees paid for inspections never performed, only to have to pay a third party to complete them."

With all due respect to the member above, the mayor is making a sincere attempt to enable more construction work to proceed in the best interests of the city, first and foremost, as well as the workers themselves.

It's great that he continues to recognize the strategic importance of residential construction, just as he did in leading the charge for the two year freeze on development charges.

This is summer time, it's prime construction weather (well, at least the days are long) and there are workers ready to jump at the chance to ply their trade. The release of 500 building permits is welcome news to those workers and to the building industry in the City of Toronto.

*Stephen Dupuis is president and CEO of the Building Industry and Land Development Association. The views expressed are those of the president. Email: [president@bildgta.ca](mailto:president@bildgta.ca).*