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Labour

End of Toronto CUPE strike a relief for industry

Assessing cost will be difficult, Toronto Construction Association says

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The end of Toronto's five-week municipal strike is a welcome sight for the Toronto Construction Association.

"Without question it has had an impact and has been disruptive — five weeks is a long time," said John Mollenhauer, Toronto Construction Association president. "Anything that disrupts construction always has broader consequences; it is just that sometimes it takes some time to assess the damage."

The city and municipal workers in CUPE Locals 416 and 79 reached a tentative deal earlier this week, bringing to an end the strike that started on June 22. CUPE Local 416, representing 6,200 outside workers, was the first to reach an agreement with the city on Monday, July 27. An agreement with CUPE Local 79, representing 18,000 inside workers, was reached later the same day. The deal is expected to be ratified some time this week.

At the outset of the strike, the Toronto Construction Association had said the deeper into the summer the work disruption continued the bigger its impact on construction would be. Mollenhauer recently said it's hard to assess the cost of stand-by times and getting permits and inspections back up to speed.

"Realizing the measures of those impacts will not be known for a while, 36 days can be an eternity," said Mollenhauer. "It is not like the city will now get back up to full speed from a standstill, whether it is moving 50,000 tonnes of garbage or processing a five-week backlog of work."

Toronto announced four weeks into the strike that it would tackle up to 500 permits in the queue by reviewing permit applications submitted before June 22, when the strike started. The permit backup is evidence that improvements in the permit issuance process can still be made, said the Residential Construction Council of Central Ontario (RESCON).

"That is why we fought for the provisions to have registered code agencies (RCA) so municipalities can sub out that work for efficiency purposes and you would not have situations like this," says Richard Lyall, RESCON president. "Our industry worked on building reforms in order to try and come up with a system where you do not come up with these artificially created system bottlenecks which delay projects."

Extensive changes to Ontario's building code, which kicked in 2005, gave municipalities the option of letting private companies take over some aspects of code enforcement and permits. A report by the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario last year concluded that there had not been "significant streamlining" in the building permit process since then and legislative tools to help deal with high permit volumes were not being used. The report recommended that municipalities make better use of RCAs to avoid delays and inefficiencies.