

City will refund fees paid for camps, lessons

But property-tax rebate ruled out

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CITY HALL BUREAU CHIEF

Toronto residents will receive refunds for children's day camps, swimming lessons and leadership programs cancelled because of the city workers strike.

At a city hall press conference, Mayor David Miller ruled out a rebate on property taxes that help pay for city services suspended since the strike by Locals 79 and 416 of the Canadian Union of Public Employees began June 22.

"We won't be doing that," he said.

More details of the city refunds are expected to be released today.

As for possible relief on garbage collection fees - a new pay-as-you-throw system is in its first full year of operation - Mr. Miller said no decision has been made.

"There are a number of alternatives we could pursue," he said.

As well, the mayor announced a special council meeting at city hall for Aug. 5 and 6 to deal with about 50 "truly urgent" items left in limbo when a July 6 council meeting was cancelled because of the strike.

But if the labour dispute is settled before Aug. 5, Mr. Miller said he would scrap the two-day session and hold a full council meeting the following week.

Leading the list of "urgent" items is the selection of a private sector investor, possibly the real-estate arm of a major pension fund, to refurbish of city-owned Union Station.

Council would also be asked to approve final plans for the Sony Centre condo, clearing the way to complete renovation of the Sony Centre for the Performing Arts, dark for the past year.

Some of the mayor's council critics have clamoured for a meeting with a wider agenda, including a mandatory freeze on a 2.4-per-cent cost of living raise for councillors and a debate about the ongoing strike by 30,000 civic workers.

Councillor Case Ootes (Ward 29, Toronto-Danforth), spokesman for the right-leaning Responsible Government Group, said there was no reason to cancel the July 6 meeting "other than he [Mr. Miller] did not want to have his NDP caucus cross the picket line."

At his press conference, Mr. Miller said the city's medical officer of health had ordered pesticide spraying of Campbell Park and a pickup of illegal garbage dumped at Bluffers Park, both stymied by pickets.

If the work cannot be carried out, the mayor said the city would seek court injunctions.

Neither the mayor nor spokesmen for the two CUPE locals had much to say about the progress of talks on new contracts to replace those that expired Dec. 31.

As of yesterday, the city reported that 824 unionized workers had asked to cross the picket lines and return to their jobs.

Approvals have been given for 597 so far.

Strike refunds

For which programs

will the city refund fees?

The city says it will return fees for all city-run day camps, swimming lessons and leadership programs cancelled because of the strike.

The city's FUN Guide lists hundreds of summer camp programs at more than 230 locations throughout the city, with many costing hundreds of dollars per session.

The guide also lists summer swimming programs for all ages at more than 80 pools throughout the city, which cost about \$30 to \$70 per week.

Leadership programs include babysitting training and other courses, such as Leaders in Training and the Youth Advisory Council.

The city began processing refunds on Monday and says those who are entitled to them should receive refunds by the end of July. Check bank and credit card statements as well as the mail for cheques.

Will the city refund fees for permits?

All other refunds, including fees paid for city permits, will be dealt with once the strike ends, the city says.

How will the city return advances paid to daycares?

Refunds for child-care fees paid in advance will be made as an adjustment to families' accounts, and invoices will be sent once centres reopen.

Will the city provide partial property tax refunds?

No.

Will the city refund garbage fees?

The city has not made a decision about whether it will refund garbage fees, but the mayor says he is considering options.

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