

<http://network.nationalpost.com/np/blogs/toronto/archive/2009/07/20/toronto-on-strike-walkout-jeopardizes-u-of-t-scarborough-expansion.aspx>

Toronto on strike: Walkout jeopardizes U of T Scarborough expansion

Posted: July 20, 2009, 5:02 PM by Rob Roberts

[Kuitenbrouwer](#), [Toronto on strike](#)

Once again, Mississauga gets the jump on Toronto.

Back in May, the University of Toronto announced two big projects: “instructional and laboratory complexes,” costing \$70 million each, at its Mississauga and Scarborough campuses. Each project will create 700 construction jobs.

Out in Mississauga, where there is no city strike, workers are preparing to put up the hoarding “in a couple of weeks” for the new classroom and lab complex, U of T spokeswoman Laurie Stephens said today. “It’s full steam ahead.”



But Toronto’s month-long city workers’ strike has stalled the sister project in Scarborough. Because the Scarborough location at Ellesmere Avenue and Military Trail was a landfill many moons ago, the city put a “holding provision” on the site. Scarborough Community Council lifted that holding provision in May and sent the decision to City Council, for approval at its July meeting.

But when the city abruptly cancelled its July 6-7 meeting because of the strike, the Scarborough project ground to a halt.

Today Councillor Ron Moeser (Scarborough East) struggled to get the building back on track, calling Mayor David Miller’s office to demand he hold a city council meeting and put the U of T project on the agenda.

“Now it’s time for us to meet,” Mr. Moeser told me. “It’s time for us to get on with our work. I want to make sure this is going to happen.”

The mayor’s office and the city press office did not return my calls on the project. The mayor told our paper yesterday that he plans a council meeting at City Hall some time this summer.

This is not the only U of T project slowed by the strike. The university also plans a \$20-million mining centre on the top floor of its historic Mining Building on College Street, to house a design studio and space for 27 graduate and post-doctoral researchers. That project, receiving \$11-million in government money, needs a demolition permit, a heritage easement agreement and a zoning variance from the Committee of Adjustment.

Jumping those hurdles may prove more difficult than green-lighting the Scarborough project. “No new business can be filed with the Committee of Adjustment until the labour disruption is over,” notes a source in the office of Councillor Adam Vaughan (Trinity-Spadina).

Time is tight. The Government of Canada, donor of this Knowledge Infrastructure money in partnership with Ontario, demands “substantial completion” of all the facilities by March 31, 2011, which is just 20 months from now.

“There’s a hard deadline in terms of when we have to have these things built,” Ms. Stephens said.

The U of T wrote a letter to Mr. Miller last week begging him to move its projects forward. The university also plans an unrelated “multi-million dollar” announcement, involving federal officials, at its chemistry building this morning.

Today at City Hall I was thrilled to see, for the first time since the strike began June 22, a tour group filing in to look around. A water fountain in City Hall, broken long before the strike began, somehow has been repaired during the strike. A few more councillors’ offices have their lights on. Someone has taken the “Out of Service” signs off the trash bins on King Street in the theatre district, and someone is collecting the litter. All these markers of normalcy give a sense that people are trying to move forward, despite the long strike.

But the walkout by unionized workers is still holding up more crucial things, such as the Scarborough project. The workers may be striking; it sure would be nice to see councillors get into the chamber and do some work.

Photo of U of T Mississauga by Peter Kuitenbrouwer, National Post