

1,080 building permits in city backlog

About 220 issued since Vancouver civic strike began on July 23

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New building construction is slowing to a virtual halt in Vancouver with only a trickle of permits coming from a strike-bound city hall.

City of Vancouver managers have only issued about 220 building permits from the stack of some 1,300 that were on file when CUPE Local 15 walked off the job on July 23, David McLellan, deputy general manager of community services, said in an interview.

The city has not accepted any new applications for building permits since the strike began, although McLellan said some 500 additional permits for trade work have also been handed out. He expects the backlog of applications that is building will be considerable.

"I wouldn't be surprised if we received 300 [applications for single-family-dwelling construction] in the first week we open up again," McLellan added, whenever that might be.

City and union officials were heading back to the negotiating table Monday.

There are 10 managers in the community-services department working through the permits in the system with priority given to those that are simple to complete, or where builders are in "life-or-death or go-broke" situations, according to McLellan.

Bigger projects that already have building permits are able to use certified professional engineers to conduct building inspections, Maureen Enser, executive director of the Urban Development Institute said.

Builders, however, are racking up losses. Some companies paying construction crews to essentially sit idle out of fear they'll lose experienced tradespeople in the hot job market. And additional interest charges on construction financing are increasing while projects sit idle.

"That's where your profit gets eaten up," Bill Eden, president of the Eden Group of Companies said in an interview.

Eden estimates he is losing \$50,000-\$75,000 a month on a condominium

project at Oak Street and 43rd Avenue that needs a building permit. At another project located at East 11th Avenue and Sophia Street where he is waiting for the city to install water and sewer services, the losses are in the order of \$300,000 per month.

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