

Miller sees a 'bit of light' in strike talks

But CUPE Local 79 president gives downbeat assessment of talks

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For Toronto residents weary of a four-week-old strike by 24,000 city workers, Toronto Mayor David Miller says he sees “a little bit of light” in the grinding march toward a settlement.

He cites “meaningful movement” over the weekend – the first in six months in his view – in bargaining with Locals 79 and 416 of the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

“There needs to be a sense of urgency and I was seeking that a little more over the weekend,” he told reporters, but declined to speculate on the timing of a possible deal.

But CUPE Local 79 president Ann Dembinski, representing inside workers, gave a more downbeat assessment of the negotiations.

She accused the city of having no urgency in coming to deal.

As of this afternoon, she said the city had not responded to an offer tabled by her local Sunday afternoon.

“We gave them something that could resolve this and they are not interested or they are indicating no interest,” she declared.

For his part, Mr. Miller said that the city's offer, made public last Friday, “is fair and reasonable and should produce a settlement.”

The final sticking points in the negotiations are monetary – the amount of wage increases (the city has offered 7.2 per cent compounded over the next four years) and the cost to replace a system of banked sick days with new, less expensive short-term disability program.

A spokeswoman for CUPE Local 416, which represents outside workers, said union officials met today with the city. “Picket lines remain strong, and the members are firmly behind our bargaining committee,” said Allison Gifford, in an e-mail statement. “We will continue to focus on bargaining and evaluate our next steps.”