

City Employee Collective Bargaining Implementation

Denver City Council

Ordinance Amending Chapter 18, D.R.M.C.

October 21, 2025

Governance and Intergovernmental Relations Committee

Councilmember Sarah Parady & Councilwoman Jamie Torres

Outline

- Background
- Purpose of the Bill
- Stakeholding & Drafting Process
- Ordinance Summary & Definitions
- Ordinance Section Breakdown
- Next Steps



“There are so many people waiting for this to happen, and I think it’s time.”

— Ed Bagwell, Teamsters Local 17 Vice President



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Background

What is Collective Bargaining?

Employees and employers negotiate and agree on the terms and conditions of employment.

Collective Bargaining in Denver

- Teachers
- Firefighters
- Police

Collective Bargaining in the U.S.

- 75% of private sector workers
- 66% of public employees

- In **July 2024** City Council referred Measure 2U: Collective Bargaining for City Employees to the ballot.
 - *Sponsored by Councilmembers Parady, Gonzales-Gutierrez, Hinds, Lewis, Sawyer, Gilmore, Kashmann, Alvidrez, Torres, Romero Campbell, and Watson*
- In **November 2024**, voters passed the ordinance by a 30-point margin. The Charter Amendment expressly requires City Council to pass an **ordinance addressing the implementation of Referred Measure 2U**



What This Means for City Employees & Denver

Collective Bargaining in the Public Interest

- When public workers can collectively address workplace issues, they are better able to advocate for the public they serve.

Benefits of Collective Bargaining:

- Provides a way to solve workplace problems.
- Reduces wage gaps based on race and gender and offers protection against discrimination.
- Increases job satisfaction among workers.
- Improves workplace safety.

This Ordinance establishes a clear framework for collective bargaining in Denver

Creates fair, transparent processes for:

- Union recognition
- Dispute resolution
- Mediation & arbitration

Protects employee rights while balancing city authority



Purpose

This is an ordinance to implement Referred Measure 2U: Collective Bargaining for City Employees, passed by the voters in Fall of 2024. The charter amendment expressly requires us to pass an ordinance addressing several matters, all included herein.



Eligible Employees

INCLUDES

- All career service employees and employees of the City Council
- Library Commission
- Civil Service Commission
- Board of Adjustment
- Denver Water.

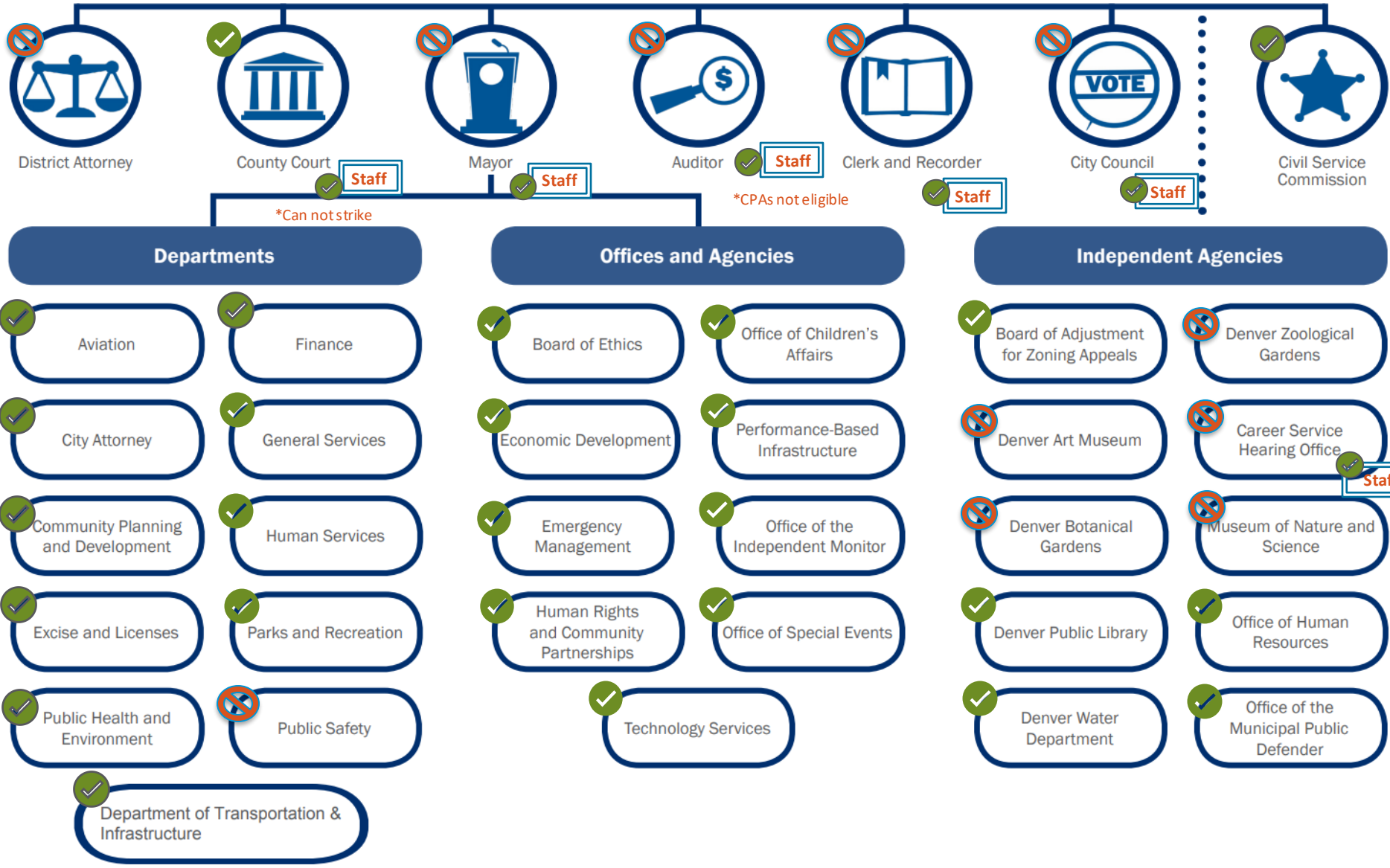
EXCLUDES

- Police, Fire, and Sheriff's departments who already have collective bargaining rights
- career service employees of the Denver Health and Hospital Authority.
- All supervisory and confidential employees
- Certain political appointees and elected officials are excluded per 9.1.1(E).

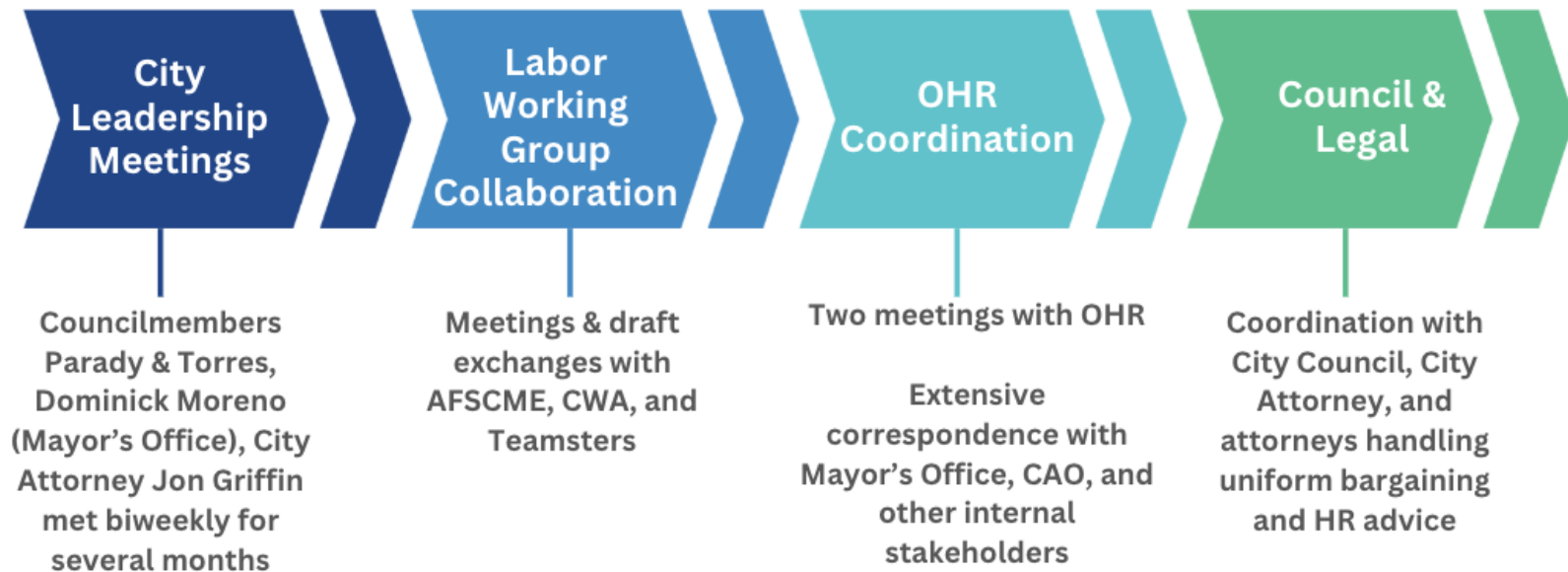




The People of the City and County of Denver



Stakeholding & Drafting Process



Ordinance Summary

Implements collective bargaining rights for certain Denver city employees by amending Chapter 18 of the Denver Revised Municipal Code.

1. Definitions & Applicability
2. Panel of Arbitrators
3. Panel of Mediators
4. Bargaining Unit Determination
5. Election of Bargaining Agent
6. Payroll Deductions
7. Collective Bargaining Procedures
8. Collective Labor Actions & Lockouts
9. Binding Arbitration & Court Review
10. Unfair Labor Practices
11. TBD: Management Rights (*would augment rights in charter; under discussion with stakeholders*)



Definitions

The charter amendment included most necessary definitions. The ordinance adds a few more that arose in drafting.

Charter:

- *Bargaining agent*
- *Bargaining-eligible employees*
- *Bargaining unit*
- *Confidential employee*
- *Corporate Authority*
- *Employee organization*
- *Executive employees*
- *Supervisory employee*

Ordinance:

- *Association*
- *City employee*
- *Showing of interest petition*
- *Petitioner*
- *Service*
- *Represented employee*
- *Collective labor action*
- *Collective labor action authority*



Dispute Resolution Panels

Panel of Arbitrators (Sec. 18-332)

- Creates the panel of arbitrators who will decide various disputes including the appropriateness of a proposed or existing bargaining unit.
- Structure:
 - Permanent panel, appointed by City Council
 - Odd number of at least 3 arbitrators to serve 6-year terms
 - No limit on number of terms an arbitrator can serve
- Arbitrators select a Lead Arbitrator who serves as point of contact and assigns panel members to cases.
- Requires compliance with Colorado Code of Judicial Conduct.

Panel of Mediators (Sec. 18-333)

- Creates a panel of mediators to mediate bargaining impasses.
- Neutral professionals in labor relations
- Structure:
 - Anyone who is an arbitrator is automatically available as a mediator.
 - Appointment, terms, etc. are same in all respects as for arbitrators.
 - Qualifications are different because arbitrator is quasi-judicial; refers instead to city code of ethics and is primarily about avoiding conflicts.



Procedures for Filing a Petition for Recognition as a Bargaining Unit & Setting the Parameters of the Unit

- Steps towards recognition of an employee bargaining unit:
 - **File Petition with AAA** – Include union info, job titles, and approximate employee numbers
 - **Submit “Showing of Interest”** – Names and signatures of employees supporting the petition. Preliminary showing of interest required (33% of employees)
 - **Employer Disclosure & Posting** – Employer provides a list of all employees in the proposed unit and posts copies of the petition for all employees to see.
- **Creates a process for other unions to “intervene”** and show that more of the employees in the bargaining unit prefer their representation over the petitioning union.
- Establishes a **process to resolve disputes** over whether the proposed bargaining unit, as defined, includes employees whose interests are similar enough to bargain together ("appropriateness"), which may involve a hearing before an arbitrator.

Elections (Sec. 18-335)

Specifies that an election may be avoided if the employees and the relevant Corporate Authority to agree to a (simpler) card check process instead.

- Secret ballot elections, mail or electronic
 - 14-day notice to employees
- Options: certified bargaining agent(s) or “no representation”
- Runoff election if no majority
- Ballots available in English/Spanish (others if requested)
- Objections resolved by arbitrator – final and binding



Bargaining (Sec. 18-337)

Clarifies duties to bargain in good faith and share information, and duty to meet to set ground rules prior to bargaining

Requires Corporate Authority to release employee representatives from duty to engage in bargaining, in equal numbers to representatives on employer side

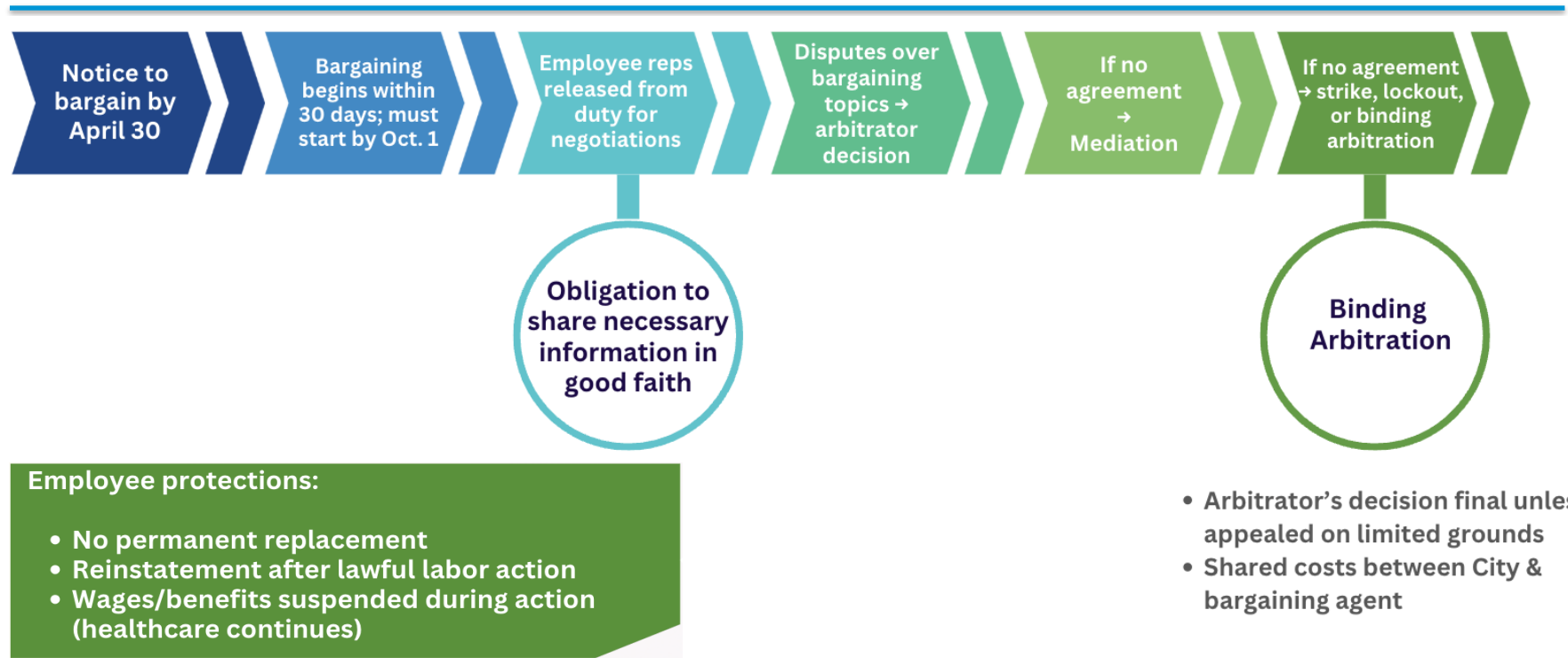
Sets timelines and procedures for arbitration if there is a dispute about what is encompassed by the charter as a "subject of bargaining" (charter is broad and clear, so should be rare).



Payroll Deduction (Sec. 18-336)

- Employees may authorize payroll deductions for:
 - Union dues
 - Other payments, which can include voluntary political contributions
- Deductions processed by the City and transmitted to bargaining agents
 - Employee may only change dues deduction once per year to minimize burden
- Based on state law applicable to county workers.

Collective Bargaining Process (Sec. 18-337) & Impasse & Labor Actions (Secs. 18-338 – 18-340)



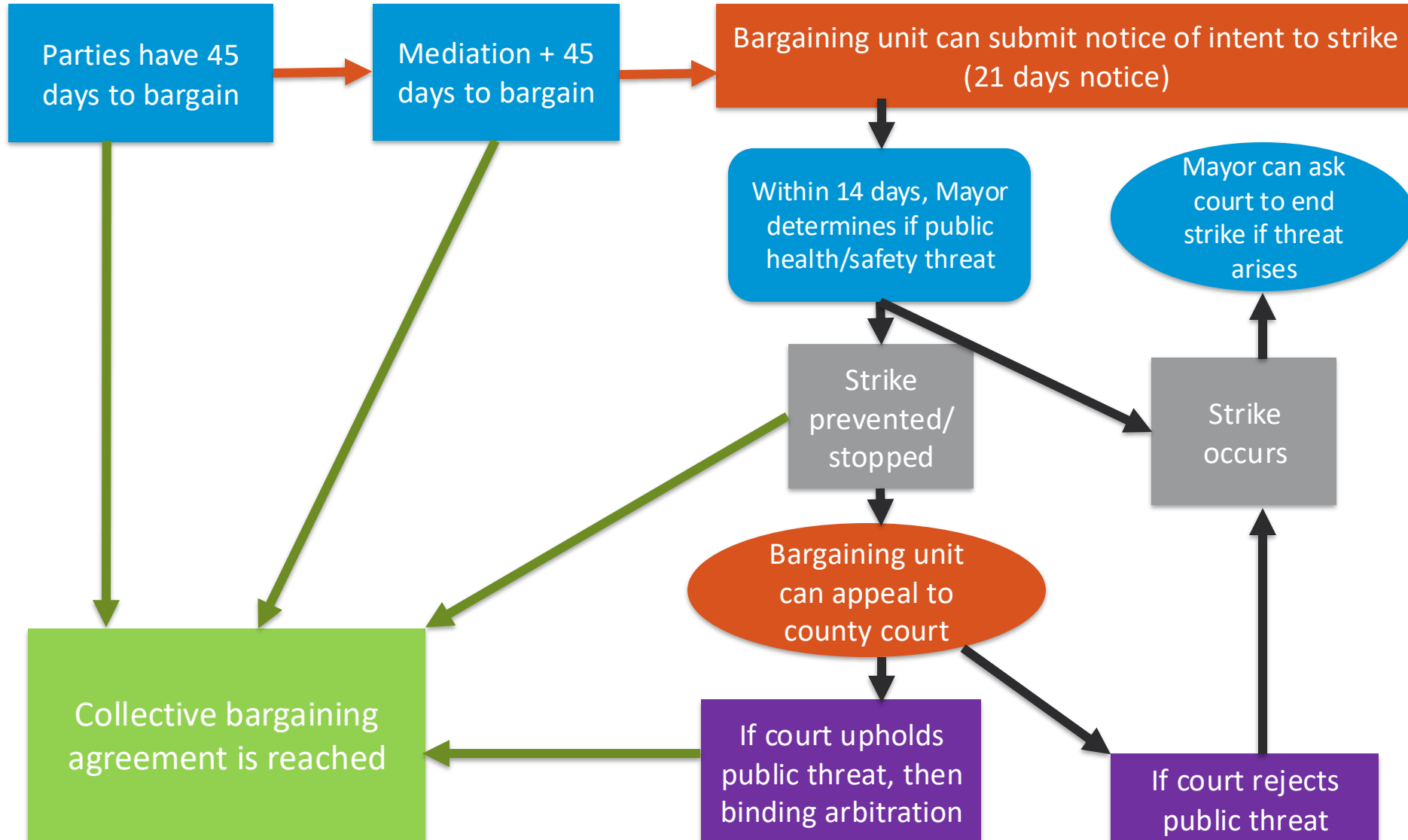
Strike Guidelines

- Challenges from a City determination that a collective labor action after bargaining impasse would be too dangerous to public health, safety or welfare can be filed in county court
- Filed within 30 days, and handled on an expedited basis and reviewed for abuse of discretion.
- Sets process for a corporate authority to ask a court to determine that a collective labor action in progress had become too dangerous to public health, safety or welfare
- Creates process for bargaining agent to choose binding interest arbitration instead of a collective labor action as a way to resolve an impasse.
- Protects employees' right to return to work after a collective action and provides details around employer's ability to suspend wages but not benefits.



Impasse Process

↑ = unsuccessful



Unfair Labor Practices (Sec. 18-341)

Corporate Authority cannot:

- Retaliate against employees for union activity
- Interfere with or dominate employee organizations
- Use public resources to support or oppose unions
- Refuse to bargain in good faith
- Deny employee representation rights

Employee organization cannot:

- Restrain or coerce employees
- Make untruthful statements or intimidate
- Refuse to bargain in good faith
- Refuse to comply with binding arbitration award or other arbitrator decision

Remedy: File ULP complaint with arbitrator.



Next Steps

~~Governance & Intergovernmental Relations Committee + Public
Comment – October 21st~~

Mayor-Council - October 28th

First Reading – November 3rd

Second Reading – November 10th



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Questions?