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Cockrel meets Granholm, says a 'beautiful friendship' could bloom

David Josar / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- City Council President Kenneth V. Cockrel Jr. spent about an hour in his first face-to-face meeting with Gov. Jennifer Granholm since Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick announced he would step down next week.

Cockrel, quoting from "Casablanca," characterized the session as "the beginning of a very beautiful friendship."

The pair met in the governor's office inside One Cadillac Place, the state office building in the New Center neighborhood in Detroit. The building was also the venue where Granholm held a hearing last week aimed at removing the Kilpatrick from office, but the proceeding was halted after the mayor agreed to plead guilty to two felonies related to the text-message scandal and resign.

With Cockrel were one plainclothes Detroit police officer and his spokesman, Daniel Cherrin.

"It was very productive ...it was a good start," said Cockrel who, under the City Charter, will become interim mayor on Sept. 19. The pair primarily discussed plans to expand Cobo Center and the state's revenue sharing payments to the city, of which about $23 million has currently been withheld because of problems with the city's financial audit.

"We need to get our financial house in order," Cockrel said in reference to money the state is holding back.

Cockrel said that in the next week the governor's staff will meet to discuss Cobo with Cockrel's recently appointed point-man on the project, George Jackson, who had been the city's chief development officer under Kilpatrick.

Coincidentally, Jackson was in the lobby of the building during the meeting. He said he is still getting "up to speed" on Cobo but is optimistic an expansion plan, which would be palatable

to state, city and county leaders, is within reach.

"We can get this done," he said.

Next week, the council is expected to vote on a holding a special election in February to fill the rest of Kilpatrick's term, which would have expired at the end of 2009.

Cockrel has said he will run for that seat but because he is most interested in running the city, he won't be a conventional campaigner.

"I can't spend a lot of time handing out literature," he said.

And he reiterated he has no plans to move into the Manoogian Mansion, which is a housing perk that comes with being mayor, anytime soon.

"I have more important things to focus on than living in a mansion," he said.

The governor did not address the media after the meeting.

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