

Authority appointed to oversee Cobo to meet Thursday

BY KATHLEEN GRAY • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • MARCH 18, 2009

Even though its existence is uncertain, a regional authority appointed to oversee operations at Cobo Center will meet at 8 a.m. Thursday to begin mapping out the future of the convention center.

If the authority survives a challenge by the Detroit City Council, it is supposed to assume control of Cobo on April 20. The meeting in Room DO-4C will be the first for the five-member authority, comprised of one representative each from Detroit, the counties of Wayne, Oakland and Macomb and the state of Michigan.

Under the state legislation passed in December, the authority is to meet within 30 days of being appointed for an organizational meeting, electing officers and enacting rules that will govern the authority.

The authority also will look at a draft plan to request proposals for a management company to take over running the convention center.

The tentative RFP [calls](#) for bids to be submitted by April 1 and a management company being named by April 20. But Wayne County Executive Robert Ficano said the plan was drawn up so that it could be included as a starting point for discussion at the meeting, not immediate action.

Oakland County officials raised concerns about how quickly the draft RFP was calling for the hiring of a management company and worried that it would translate into a hand-picked firm approved by Wayne County getting the management contract.

“That RFP is carved out to support the firm that they want selected,” Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson said. “But that’s just the old way of doing business and we’re going to do things by the book.”

But nothing can be done on the authority without unanimous consent of all five members, because each representative retains veto power over any action or contract the authority considers.

“At this point, we have to learn to work together instead of throwing up road blocks which will make sure that it doesn’t work,” Ficano said.

Oakland County is only one potential roadblock, however. The Detroit City Council voted last month to reject transferring Cobo to the regional authority. Detroit Mayor Ken Cockrel Jr. vetoed that action and the council has sued, claiming that Cockrel didn't have the authority to veto their action. Wayne County Circuit Judge Isidore Torres has set a March 26 hearing on the council's lawsuit.