

COBO CONFLICT CONTINUES



By Diane Bukowski

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DETROIT — At press time, the fate of the city's ownership of Cobo Hall hung on the outcome of City Council's lawsuit.

The suit asks the court to invalidate Interim Mayor Kenneth Cockrel, Jr.'s, veto of the council resolution blocking Cobo's sale to a regional authority.

Wayne County Circuit Court Judge Isidore Torres on May 30 postponed his decision on the case while the Council, Cockrel, Jr. ,and the Detroit Building Authority, which has intervened on Cockrel's side, engage in settlement talks.

City Council President Monica Conyers talks to media

"The parties have been engaged in trying to resolve the issues," said Torres. "The court has also been prepared to issue a ruling, but the parties have asked me to hold back on my ruling to give them an opportunity. I don't have a time frame, only the Judge can decide when his ruling comes out."

He enjoined the parties from discussing of the status of negotiations as they continue.

As she left court, a beaming City Council President Monica Conyers said simply, "We want Detroiters to be happy and continue to own Cobo Hall."

Looking rather grim, Deputy Mayor Saul Green huddled with Detroit Economic Growth Authority (DEGC) President George Jackson, Detroit Building Authority head Morley Witus, and city law department representatives in the hallway during breaks in the negotiations May 30.

The Council is represented by attorney David Whitaker, head of their Research and Analysis Division, attorney Adam Shakoor, formerly Mayor Coleman Young's chief of staff, and former Detroit Public Schools attorney Marcel Hurt.

City Council President Pro-Tem JoAnn Watson has said the battle is over the "right to self-determination" of a majority Black city.

Detroit has been beleaguered by out-city forces which have already taken control of the former Detroit General Hospital, the Detroit Zoo, the Institute of Arts, the Historical Museum, and Eastern Market, and are still angling to get the city's crowning jewel, the Detroit Water and Sewage Department.

The parties differ on whether the Mayor's veto power over Council acts can supercede the terms of PA 554 and its tie-barred Acts 553, 555, 556, and 586, all signed by Governor Jennifer Granholm Jan. 15.

PA 554 specifically gives Council the authority to kill the deal.

Torres heard arguments from the opposing sides March 26, as demonstrators picketed outside the Coleman A. Young Center.

Among them were members of the National Planning Committee of the World Social Forum (WSF), who had traveled from around the country to plan their annual international meeting on the struggles of poor and working people world-wide. The convention, which will be held at Cobo Hall next year, is expected to attract at least 20,000 to 30,000 participants.

"We love the energy of Detroit and the resilience of its people, and we believe that local organizations and movements should control their own destinies," said Genaro Lopez-Rendon of San Antonio, Texas.

Ricardo Martinez of Denver, Colorado, added, "The citizens of Detroit should have the right to maintain control of their facilities. The government has been giving the corporations a free ride at the expense of the people for far too long."

Ann Grimmatt of the Michigan Welfare Rights Organization said her group had invited the WSF to Detroit.

Despite the ongoing legal battle, the Detroit Regional Convention Facility Authority's board held its first meeting March 19 at 8 a.m. at Cobo Hall.

The selection of a private management company to run the convention center, an item that Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson demanded be included in the legislation, was on the agenda among other matters.

The plain language of PA 554 forbids such a discussion by the Authority's board at this point.

"Before the transfer date, an authority may organize and exercise all powers, duties, and jurisdictions granted under this act, except the powers, duties and jurisdictions related to the management, operation and development of a qualified convention facility," says the Act.

Nonetheless, a battle over a request for proposals for the management company, which had already been drafted, took place at the meeting.

Patterson has called its language too restrictive, partly because it includes a preference for the tri-county area. Ironically, Patterson, abetted by Wayne County Executive Robert Ficano, made sure that language forbidding preferences for Detroit businesses and workers was included in PA 554.

Patterson later said in published remarks, "If this thing goes down, I'm done. I'm not going to go back to Detroit to try to resurrect the deal. Five years is enough." He then threatened to try to lure the International Auto Show to Oakland County.

The board includes Gov. Jennifer Granholm's representative Larry D. Alexander, CEO of the Detroit Metro Convention and Visitors Bureau, who was elected chairman at the meeting. Also on the panel are Ficano's pick, MGM Grand executive Juliette Thorpe Okotie-Eboh, Cockrel, Jr.'s, appointee DEGC Vice-President Waymon Guillebeaux, Patterson's representative Mike Carroll, CFO of a Pontiac construction firm, and Macomb County Board of Commissioners Chairman Paul Gielegam's representative, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 58's Joe Abdoo.