

Man elected Detroit mayor must forge relationship with emergency manager

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Detroit —The winner of today's Detroit mayoral election will need to cool the rhetoric to get any power in city operations, say experts who have been watching developments in the city.

Wayne County Sheriff Benny Napoleon and former Detroit Medical Center CEO Mike Duggan opposed the emergency manager appointment, but they differ on how they would work with the Washington, D.C.,

bankruptcy attorney. Napoleon plans a more confrontational approach, while Duggan intends to be more positive.

Financial experts advise the mayoral winner to be diplomatic if he hopes to wield more authority soon.

The new mayor will have to become engaged with the city's challenges and forge a relationship with Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr quickly, said Jim McTevia, a turnaround specialist with the Bingham Farms firm McTevia & Associates.

Elected officials still will have to deal with the city's problems, so this is not a time for pride, McTevia said. His recommendation for the mayoral winner?

"Keep your eyes open, your ears open and your mouth shut," he said. "Listen and learn."

Whoever wins the election would work with Stacy Fox, the Detroit deputy emergency manager who oversees city operations, charged with working on the transition with the new mayor.

The emergency manager eventually will go away — it is just a matter of how many months or years, experts noted. Pontiac remains under state supervision even after its emergency manager left in August after five years.

Brad Coulter, managing director of the Bloomfield Hills financial consulting firm O'Keefe, said the new mayor will have to initiate a transition period and bring to Orr a plan of how to run the city while the emergency manager and his team take care of securing the city's finances.

The advice of financial experts fits the approach of Duggan, who said his goal is to convince Gov. Rick Snyder and Orr to dissolve the emergency manager post as soon as possible.

"If I do get elected, it will be because the people of Detroit want me to improve the quality of services,"

Duggan said Monday. “I will do whatever it takes to make that happen. It will be easier if we have a positive and constructive relationship with the governor and emergency manager” and convince them to let the mayor make more decisions.

He said he hopes, if elected, to be allowed to start building a cabinet and begin running city operations Jan. 1.

“I took over as CEO of DMC in January 2004, and by May had implemented the 29-minute emergency room standard and recruited an entirely new cardiology team,” Duggan said. “We need to move with urgency on city services.”

Napoleon has called for a separation of responsibilities between the emergency manager and the mayor.

Napoleon used his “One Square Mile Initiative” — that would place a police officer in a one-mile beat radius throughout the city — as an example of something in which Orr should have no involvement.

“Certainly the EM is not capable of managing the city operations as he hired Gary Brown to do so. I will urge the EM that the elected mayor leads the day-to-day city operations,” Napoleon said.

Napoleon has argued the courts eventually will rule the state emergency manager law unconstitutional.

“We know that Mr. Orr at this point has unrestricted power,” Napoleon said Monday at a campaign stop outside the new Meijer store on Eight Mile. “No one in any elected capacity has the power to be able to do what he can do now. It’s unconscionable.”

The issue over Duggan’s involvement in the emergency manager selection has been an issue. Napoleon has claimed Duggan was part of a “conspiracy” to drive the city into bankruptcy court. Duggan maintained he argued to avoid appointing an emergency manager — a statement backed by Snyder officials, who said he was asked to be considered for that role at the Detroit Public Schools but declined.

Pontiac’s elected officials fought the emergency manager and still don’t have power, said Timothy Wittebort, attorney with Howard & Howard in Royal Oak, who was appointed by then-Gov. Jennifer Granholm to Pontiac’s financial review team.

Detroit should learn from the experience of the Oakland County city, Wittebort said.

Detroit “elected officials have a chance to work with the emergency manager if they show some level of cooperation,” he added.



Benny Napoleon talks to residents as he campaigns Monday at Meijer in Detroit. Napoleon believes the state's EM law is unconstitutional.

- Deandre Windom, the mayor of Highland Park, was shot in the leg early this morning during a melee inside a Detroit night club, officials said.

On Tuesday, Nov. 19, Detroit Mayor-elect Mike Duggan will keynote a forum exploring how to lead the city back to democracy. Be a member of the audience and join the discussion!