

# Archer's agenda in doubt, experts say

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With only eight months left in his Detroit mayoral career, Dennis Archer still has some lofty goals and a laundry list of unfinished business to tend to before he walks out the door Dec. 31.

But as a lame-duck mayor and with an often recalcitrant City Council to deal with, some question how much he can accomplish.

Contracts with the city's 17,000 employees expire on June 30 and have to be renegotiated. The MGM Grand Detroit Casino's move to the riverfront remains uncertain. The question of a Belle Isle entrance fee still looms. And a number of deadlines for projects Archer proposed in his State of the City address in January are either drawing near or have past.

"As far as Archer trying to put his agenda across, it's dead in the water," said political consultant Adolph Mongo. "When you are a lame duck, especially at the end of the term, it's not likely that you're going to be successful. If I was sitting on the City Council, I would say let the new mayor move on issues like the casinos."

Casinos are perhaps the biggest issue that will have to be addressed by the mayor and council in the coming months.

There is controversy about moving MGM Grand to the riverfront. At least five council members are opposed.

**BELLE ISLE:** A city planning document describes Detroit's 982-acre island park as being "in crisis" and says it will cost \$180 million to fix. Mayor Dennis Archer wanted to impose an entrance fee; most cities have figured out other ways to finance their showcase parks.

**PEOPLE MOVER:** The city already subsidizes the 2.9-mile light-rail loop around downtown because it carries so few passengers. Archer says the People Mover needs \$32 million in repairs.

**FINANCES:** City pay raises; revenue is dwindling because of tax reductions; state revenue sharing is frozen; expenses are on the increase and the economy is going sour. Translation: The city faces budget problems.

**ABANDONED BUILDINGS:** Even after the Archer administration

Jerome Pesick, a lawyer who represents some of the riverfront land owners, said the casino issue must be resolved before the mayor leaves office, or "the whole thing could fall apart."

MGM Grand Detroit's president and chief executive officer, Scott Snow, said he is hopeful. "My understanding is the council

## CHALLENGES FACING THE NEXT MAYOR



Free Press file photo

tore down more than 16,000 vacant houses, derelict buildings continue to be an expensive public health and safety problem.

**MASS TRANSIT:** The mayor who figures out how to get metro Detroit moving on some sort of light-rail system — even if it's

only to Metro Airport — will go down in history.

**SCHOOLS:** Perhaps the most complicated challenge for a new mayor is keeping change moving forward in the troubled system.

**CITY-OWNED LAND:** The in-

has been meeting with the mayor to get more details and will be voting in the next month or two."

Archer has warned the council that a failure to approve the casino plan could result in huge budget setbacks and possibly layoffs because anticipated tax revenue would be delayed. The city is expecting to receive about \$85 mil-

lion in casino taxes this fiscal year and about \$94 million next fiscal year.

To plead his case with the council, the mayor will rely heavily on potential casino employees and the building trades unions that would stand to benefit from the building expansions, said Archer's spokesman, Greg Bowers.

ventory of city-owned property is in chaos and is preventing neighborhood redevelopment.

**PUBLIC LIGHTING:** Can the new mayor make the lights stay on? Does Detroit need to keep its own power department?

**POLICE AND FIRE:** It doesn't get much more basic than protecting the public. But the U.S. Justice Department is probing the cops, and, under Archer, fire service suffered.

**RETAIL:** Archer made progress drawing retailers into neighborhoods, but there is plenty of work to be done. Just check out Gratiot, Grand River, Jefferson, Fort, etc.

Sources: Mayor Archer's Vision 2002 statement and Free Press reporting

"The mayor has already met with some union officials, community groups, nonprofit and for-profit organizations, to let them know what will happen if people play games with the casino plan," Bowers said. The mayor has asked the council to vote on the issue by May.

But Councilwoman Kay Everett said that is very unlikely because the council is still waiting on the amended development agreement and has many more questions.

"The problem with this administration is they don't give us any information, then they expect us to roll over and do things when

they ask," she said.

Council President Gil Hill predicted Archer would have a hard time getting anything passed.

"Quite frankly, it's bad being a lame duck under any circumstances because you are hampered on everything," said Hill, who is considering a run for mayor.

On the larger issue of city contracts, Al Garrett, president of AFSCME Local 25, said he hopes negotiations aren't hampered. Local 25 represents a majority of the city's employees.

"We would hope that he would recognize the hard work of the employees we represent and not tie us up in the any of the political wrangling," Garrett said.

Archer said in his budget address that he has made an allotment in the 2001-02 budget for "modest" raises for city employees in the first year, but did not say how much.

The mayor has made good on some promises already.

He has gotten a commitment from the Michigan Department of Transportation to improve highway cleanup efforts in the city. Ninety-four percent of the 1,100 abandoned homes he promised last October to have demolished by the end of March have been torn down, according to city records.

He also promised to try to remove every abandoned vehicle from the streets by the end of April, eliminate illegal dumping sites by Oct. 28, and have every street cleaned by the middle of May.

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