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## Mayor assesses Detroit's hopes, frustrations

*Eighteen months after taking office, Mayor Dave Bing remains optimistic about the future of Detroit -- and confident on his ability to lead the city. In his office on Tuesday, Bing talked with Detroit Free Press editorial writer Jeff Gerritt about his plans for the city and why he thinks one term isn't enough to fix Detroit's problems.*

**Question: Michigan Central Station continues to be an iconic eyesore. Are you ready to give owner Manuel (Matty) Moroun a deadline for redeveloping the building or tearing it down?**

Answer: That conversation will be in the first quarter of next year. We will develop a timeline in terms of what he needs to do -- or we're going to have to take some action. I think six months is probably reasonable. He's had enough time to come up with some kind of plan.

**Q: The contract for Robert Bobb, the emergency financial manager for Detroit Public Schools, is up in March. How will you proceed with improving the school system after that, and will you pursue mayoral control of the district?**

A: I've talked to Robert Bobb. We've tried to impress on him -- and I think he's receptive -- that he should stay at least until the end of the school year in June. I think the incoming governor will have the responsibility of figuring out whether there's going to be a change in legislation at the state level or whether he would replace Robert Bobb with another financial manager. The mayor's office has to be involved. If we don't have a strong delivery system for public education, then everything this office is doing will go for naught.

**Q: I don't sense a strong desire from you to take the district over.**

A: Number 1, my plate is full. Taking over a system with another \$300-plus million in debt is a lot for me to deal with. If I have to, I will, but I need some help. We have a community right now that's fighting that change. Until we get on the same page in terms of whether or not there's mayoral control, what role an elected board should play, and what kind of changes need to occur -- it's one of those fights that you can't win.

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**Q: Detroit hasn't had a good working relationship with the governor's office, maybe since Coleman Young was mayor and William Milliken was governor. Do you expect to have a good relationship with Gov.-elect Rick Snyder, and will he be a friend to the city of Detroit?**

A: I went to Ann Arbor and met with him a week or so ago. I knew him before, as businesspeople. We're going to be partners. We're going to be joined at the hip. There's no way this state will come back without Detroit coming back. I realize that, and he realizes that. We're going to do things around the state together, and we're going

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to do things even outside of this state in Washington, D.C., together. I do think he'll be a friend to cities.

**Q: Has the relationship between you and the City Council deteriorated to the point where it's hurting the city, and how can you improve it?**

A: The first step we need to take is an understanding and acceptance of our role. Detroit is a strong-mayoral government. We've got too many people thinking they're mayor or wanting to become mayor. I've got no problem with someone wanting to become mayor, but if we don't fix the problems we're confronted with right now, it won't matter. We're wasting time and resources.

**Q: I've heard little about the M-1 Rail project, to run light rail down Woodward from Hart Plaza to 8 Mile, since U.S. Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood was in town last August. Is that project still on track with the private investors who have committed \$120 million to the plan?**

A: The project is on track. I would think by the latter part of 2011 the environmental assessment should be done. At that point, we can move on with construction. We have a very strong relationship with the Department of Transportation. As it relates to the local investors, they're on board. I have a meeting next week with the **leadership** of the investors. We may not agree on everything but, once again, when you talk about something of this magnitude, you're dependent on the federal government for some funding. They take the lead and they will lead it with the city, and the investors will be involved.

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**Q: The Department of Justice recently cleared FBI agents of wrongdoing in the shooting death of Imam Luqman Ameen Abdullah, but community groups remain critical, not only of how Abdullah was killed**

**but also of the use of government informants and the massive amount of resources devoted to investigating a case in which no terrorism charges were filed. Do you think there needs to be a broader civil rights investigation by the federal government?**

A: Yes. ... I do hear the outcry from a lot of people in our community who aren't satisfied with the way things went down. Whenever something like this happens, there are a lot questions, a lot of distrust with our system in general. There are a lot of people in our community who aren't satisfied with the outcome and decision and want a broader perspective.

**Q: Do you support the building of a publicly owned second span over the Detroit River?**

A: Yes. Either bridge would be OK with me because of the potential of creating several thousand jobs for people who live in this area. But because Windsor doesn't want him (Ambassador Bridge owner Manuel Moroun) over there, I don't see how I can support that right now. So I've publicly supported DRIC, the other bridge.

**Q: Would you prefer that the Detroit Pistons be sold to a local investor like Mike Ilitch?**

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A: Yes, because of the ties to Detroit. Is someone from the outside going to have the same commitment to the city? I'm not sure. No doubt, I have an interest and desire that the Pistons would be sold and come downtown. Without a doubt, having the Pistons and Red Wings in the same building is the most positive outcome. There are things we can do, but if there are a lot of **incentives** that are necessary (to build a new stadium) -- I don't have the answer to that today. I'm dealing with a city in financial stress.

**Q: Are you open to creating tax free zones in the city, as some in the business community are proposing?**

A: Absolutely. ... I don't know enough about it, and I think a lot of legislative things would have to change, but I surely won't close the door to Detroit being a tax-free city.

**Q: What have been the most frustrating and satisfying parts of your job as mayor?**

A: The most satisfying would be the relationships I've built with people in this city. There are a lot of good people I've gotten to know. Also the level of competency and commitment of my staff. We've got people working 14 hours a day to make a difference. The most stressful thing is that people think you can fix everything yesterday. You get a lot of detractors and complaints. It's a very vocal minority. One of the things that I'm upset about is that we've got this solid majority who want things to get better, but they don't speak out. They allow that minority to become the voice of this city, and they're not.

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