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## Detroit council takes step toward mayor's ouster

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By Zachary Gorchow and Naomi R. Patton, The Detroit Free Press

DETROIT — The Detroit City Council on Tuesday voted to launch a two-track effort to remove Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick from office by both beginning its own process and asking Gov. Jennifer Granholm to oust him.

The vote was 5-4 as the council made a historic move to topple a mayor over a scandal involving explicit text messages to his former aide.

The text messages between the mayor and former Chief of Staff Christine Beatty were revealed earlier this year. The two had testified during a whistle-blowers' lawsuit that they did not have a romantic relationship.

Prosecutors have charged the two with perjury and obstruction of justice.

Council members also voted to publicly censure the mayor.

A delicate majority in favor of removing Kilpatrick managed to hold together overnight.

Voting yes were Council President Ken Cockrel Jr. and council members Sheila Cockrel, Brenda Jones, Kwame Kenyatta and JoAnn Watson. Voting no were Council President Pro Tem Monica Conyers and council members Barbara-Rose Collins, Martha Reeves and Alberta Tinsley-Talabi.

But Watson later said after the meeting that she has been speaking on and off with the mayor since the weekend and had the impression Kilpatrick was considering resignation.

Watson said the mayor's resignation would be far preferable to having to forcibly remove him from office.

"I perceived movement toward my recommendation that he resign," she said. However, Watson said as of this moment she had no firm evidence that Kilpatrick would in fact quit and would stick with her vote to remove him from office.

Both processes backed by the council are expected to take months.

The council set an initial public hearing for its removal hearings for June 13.

The independent attorney hired by the council to assist with its investigation, Bill Goodman, estimated that it would take two months for the council to complete removal hearings and then — if the council actually votes to oust Kilpatrick — another year for the mayor's appeals to play out in the courts.

How long it will take Granholm to determine Kilpatrick's fate is unclear.

Despite Tuesday's vote, the council must still submit to the governor's office a formal sworn statement requesting she remove Kilpatrick from office.

The law giving Granholm the power to remove elected local officials does not give a timetable for action.

The last time a governor conducted removal hearings on a local official was in 1982 for a West Bloomfield Township official accused of public drunkenness.

Gov. William Milliken ordered the official to quit drinking or be removed.

The council also began hearing public comments on the mayor's ouster.

"The only logical thing to do is to fire the mayor," said Rhiannon Chester, 20. "His arrogance is clear."

Most of the comments so far have been anti-Kilpatrick, but Baye Landy, 63, said Kilpatrick is doing a good job.

"This mayor has got this city out of the red and into the black," he said. "We need to let the justice system take its course."

The Council has spent weeks debating what to do with Kilpatrick: force his ouster or slap him on the wrist.

Kilpatrick has been defiant. He's held the office for six years.

The relationship between the Council and the mayor's office was strained even before revelations earlier this year that he may have misled them to approve an \$8.4 million whistle-blowers' settlement.

Council members say they were unaware of a confidentiality agreement that Kilpatrick signed that kept secret references to intimate and sexually explicit text messages between the mayor and former Chief of Staff Christine Beatty.

Excerpts of those messages were published in January in the *Detroit Free Press* and contradicted testimony Kilpatrick and Beatty gave during the whistle-blowers' trial, when they denied having a romantic relationship.

The Wayne County prosecutor's office charged the two with perjury, misconduct in office and obstruction of justice on March 24, less than a week after the Council voted 7-1 on a non-binding resolution asking Kilpatrick to resign. Kilpatrick's office has said the Council's actions are politically motivated.

The Council agrees that Kilpatrick violated the City Charter, but otherwise the group is split on what action to take. Some favor one resolution over another, while others suggested they would approve two or more of the options.

The Kilpatrick case has overshadowed city budget negotiations and the proposed sale of Detroit's half of a busy and lucrative international tunnel linking the city to Canada.

"I do not believe that any City Council in the past has had to deal with an issue of this magnitude," Detroit historian Michael Smith said of the Kilpatrick affair. "This may be the largest political issue the City Council has ever faced."

*Contributing: Associated Press*

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