

Double Duty: Mayor, Mayor-To-Be Get To Work

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While staffers for the mayor and City Council president of Baltimore are working feverishly to make the transition of power smooth, it seems the city will have two leaders for the next few weeks.

Current Mayor Sheila Dixon and the mayor in waiting, currently City Council President Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, both followed busy public schedules on Monday.

Dixon cheered on the launch of the Charm City Circulator, Baltimore's free downtown shuttle system, which was one of her transit priorities.

When 11 News asked her if cutting the ribbon five days after agreeing to resign from office was bittersweet, she responded, "No. This is great that it's happening. It's great that we finally got it, and then in the spring it will be more."

Meanwhile, Rawlings-Blake started her day focused on public safety. She attended roll call at the Eastern Police District.

"I just wanted to say thank you. We all have to work together as a team -- the officers, the community, and us in government," she said. "So, I just wanted to come by and say good morning, have a great shift and thank you again."

The leaders' public schedules merged at noon, when each woman headed her own table at the regular City Council luncheon.

A Rawlings-Blake representative said given the circumstances, the transition process is going smoothly so far with the mayor's team meeting requests and deadlines for documents and details.

Dixon also said the transition was going well.

Dixon ducked away before being asked about her \$83,000 pension that has sparked an online Facebook frenzy started by 30-year-old mortgage broker Josh Dowlett, who plans to lead an in-person protest at City Hall on Tuesday.

"I really hope a lot of people show up tomorrow, and I really hope the politicians see the majority of people are really upset over this," he said.

Later in the day, 11 News asked Dixon about her pension again. She said she wouldn't discuss it and didn't seem aware that a protest was in the works.

The protest was on the radar of Rawlings-Blake and, according to her spokesman, she asked Councilman Bill Cole to launch a review of elected officials' pensions.

"If we're talking at a time when fire and police pensions are in trouble and we're talking about the possibility of having to cut benefits long-term, shouldn't we be also talking about the same thing for elected officials?" Cole questioned.

The fire and police pension crisis hit a fever pitch on Monday. When the clock turned, the city's pension costs soared and bumped next year's budget deficit from \$127 to nearly \$190 million.

Rawlings-Blake says she working on a solution on the pension issue.

"The fire and police unions have worked with the Greater Baltimore Committee to come up with some solutions for the short term, as well as the long term. I look forward to getting that report," Rawlings-Blake said.

It was business as usual Monday night at City Hall as Rawlings-Blake led the meeting like she always does.

"I know that good times are ahead for Baltimore and I appreciate council members who were able to stand by me as we begin the process of transition," Rawlings-Blake said.

She took a couple of minutes at the end of the meeting to assure the council the work of the city will continue.

