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Perdue scouts local office

City, county officials want her to set up shop in Government Center. Parks Helms seeks a role.

By Jim Morrill

jmorrill@charlotteobserver.com

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Slideshow



****FILE**** In this Sept. 9, 2008 file photo, Governor-elect Beverly Perdue is seen prior to a gubernatorial debate at WRAL-TV in Raleigh, N.C. Although Perdue will begin 2009 with a large budget shortfall, she said she won't make that an excuse for failing to move forward with initiatives she pushed during her winning campaign. (AP Photo/Gerry Broome, file)

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If Charlotte and Mecklenburg County officials get their wish, they won't have to travel far to see the new governor.

They could just hop on the elevator.

Members of Bev Perdue's transition team are talking to city and county officials about leasing space at the Government Center for a satellite governor's office. They're also looking at privately owned sites.

Perdue, a Democrat who takes office Saturday, promised during her campaign to open a Charlotte office. No governor in memory has had one.

Local officials and business leaders say they'd welcome an office.

"We think any time that our state government leaders spend in Charlotte getting to know us and the challenges and issues we're facing here can only help us to build a positive relationship," said Charlotte Chamber president Bob Morgan.

On Tuesday, Perdue rounded out her Cabinet with four appointments including Charlotte banker Ken Lay as secretary of the Department of Revenue. He's the only Charlottean among 10 Cabinet officers and more than a dozen top agency officials and advisers named so far.

Perdue's Republican opponent, Charlotte Mayor Pat McCrory, made state government's sometimes rocky relationship with the Charlotte region an issue in the campaign. Perdue, from New Bern, countered that she would improve it.

"I'm a friend of Charlotte," she said during one appearance. "It's like coming home."

She has said she would not only maintain an office but actually work here, maybe as often as once a month. Her administration is expected to choose a site in the next few weeks.

"We're thinking sooner rather than later she should have a good spot," said Perdue spokeswoman Chrissy Pearson. "It was more than just an empty promise. She truly meant that she wants to spend a good deal of time in Charlotte."

The governor also has regional offices in Asheville and New Bern. It's unclear how much a Charlotte office and staff would cost. Some see the government center as a natural choice.

"If we're really going to build a relationship with the governor and the city, I think the best location is where all the (local government) bodies are," said City Council member James Mitchell, a Democrat.

Parks Helms, a former Democratic county commissioner, has made his own proposal for a governor's office in the government center. He's even offered to be the "primary face" of the office in a part-time capacity. No staffing decisions have been announced.

"I do think it has a great deal of merit for her and for this community in trying to create a conduit for the flow of information," he said, "and to focus on the issues ... important for the south central region of North Carolina."

Commissioners Chairman Jennifer Roberts, a Democrat, said a local governor's office is "exciting for this area, and we want to help make it happen.

"It will mean the governor will come here more often and be more visible. It will also help when elected officials here ... see people on elevators."

One of the people Perdue would likely see on the elevator is McCrory, whose own office is on the 15th floor.

Jim Morrill: 704-358-5059



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